

Portland Dahlia Society Bulletin

Meets second Tuesday of the month at Rose City Park United Methodist Church, 5830 N.E. Alameda

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Next meeting Tuesday, November 13th, 2012 @ 7:30 p.m.

MONTHLY CLUMP AUCTION

Our November meeting will feature a continuation of the "silent auction" of undivided clumps. If you have extra stock you think other members might like, please bring the November meeting. This fundraiser stimulated lots of interest and competitive bidding.

ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST

In order to make the photo contest successful, we need all members to bring lots of photos. You may show as many as you like. It doesn't have to be anything formal, just a snapshot or a printout of a digital photo will do. Anything that might be interesting for others to view. You don't have to be an ace photographer to participate and photos from past growing seasons are welcome. There will be cash prizes for standout photos, so bring what you have.

COOKIES NOVEMBER

Cookie host for November is the membership. Thanks in advance for everyone's thoughtfulness and generosity in supplying our monthly treats.

PROGRAM FOR NOVEMBER

In addition to the clump silent auction and the photo contest we will have a discussion of what went well for us in our dahlia gardens and what went not so well. New methods, procedures and stratagems will be honestly evaluated. We hope to all be able to learn from one another, share our successes and hopefully limit our disappointments. Which new introductions do you most want to grow or grow again next year? Which ones from our Trial Garden would you most like to try?

We will also have our election of officers for the coming two year term. Your nomination committee is putting the finishing touches on its proposed slate of candidates. If you would like to help out by serving on the Board, please contact Larry Smith, Mike Riordan or Shirley Bankston. Our by-laws also allow for nominations from the floor. Those so nominated must be present and indicate a willingness to serve if elected.

BOARD MEETING

Our annual board meeting will take place Saturday, January 12th 2013 at 12 noon. We will meet in the community room at the Georgetown Realty Office located at 1000 NE 122nd Avenue in Portland. From I-205 North or South bound take exit 21A to Glisan Street. Take Glisan East (street numbers increase) to 122nd Avenue. Turn left from Glisan to 122nd. Georgetown is two blocks down 122nd on your right. Parking is behind the building. We will start the meeting with a potluck luncheon. Everyone is encouraged to bring a dish they believe others will find popular. All members are welcome at this meeting. You need not be a member of the board to participate. We will be discussing what went well and where and how we can improve. What do we want to change or revise in the show schedule to make it even better? How can we increase participation in our annual show? What changes would you like to see in our monthly meeting programs? How can we go about attracting and retaining more new members? This is a planning and strategizing session, so please bring your ideas and enthusiasm.

2013 DUES ARE SOON DUE

Why not take care of this now and get it out of the way? Judges please remember that you are required to carry membership in both the American Dahlia society and the PNDC (Pacific Northwest Dahlia conference). PDS dues, ADS dues and PNDC dues should be combined and paid to the Treasurer as noted below. Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers dues are \$10 and also payable through our Treasurer.

PDS	ADS	PNDC
Adults: \$7.00	Individual: \$24.00	Individual \$10.00
Couples: \$10.00	Family: \$27.00	Dual: \$15.00
Juniors: \$1.00	Add \$8-Snowbirds	
Mail to or pay at next meeting		
Larry Sawyer, 11015 S.W. Berkshire, Portland, OR 97225		

STORING DAHLIA TUBERS

By Ted J. Kennedy

A discussion on storing dahlia tubers for the more experienced grower.

Over the years, I have seen numerous discussions on how someone successfully stored their tubers using a particular method. Then the next year or two later someone else tried this same method and it supposedly it failed for that person. I have found that there are many factors that people may overlook concerning the storage of dahlia tubers:

(1) Variety related issues; many varieties are prone to loss in storage. Barberry Bingo is a wonderful dahlia and an extremely poor keeper. Mingus Nicole is also very difficult to keep over. Why do these varieties fail to store well? They appear to make reasonably good looking tubers. It is my belief that both of them are susceptible to fungus infections that cause the tubers to rot. It may well be that the infection affects the entire plant before the tubers are dug and that very little can be done with fungicide treatments after digging and dividing. Or, maybe it is just plain bad genetics. These varieties may not have the ability to go "dormant" in storage conditions. So, when you compare storage methods one must take into consideration what varieties are being stored.



Hollyhill Monet, WL LB

(2) Very few people talk about the the actual temperature and humidity levels in their storage area. Temperature is an interesting issue. If a dahlia tuber has been properly prepared for storage, dahlias can be stored at just about any temperature above freezing. But, the storage temperature has a lot to do with the growth of insects and

fungus. Insects do not generally thrive in cool temperatures. There needs to be some research done on temperature as it affects these vectors. Humidity in the storage area is also another factor that no one seems to talk about. Some areas are more humid and some climates are more humid during the winter. I know of one grower who believes his overly humid storage area causes rot and has installed a dehumidifier there. In the Northwest, more tubers are lost to too wet storage than too dry. In climates with drier winters, there may some risk of too dry tubers. All in all, a little bit of too dry is probably better than a little bit of too wet.

(3) Tubers that are not "ripe". In many show gardens, dahlias are grown with a more than an ample supply of nutrients and water. When harvest time comes in the Fall, the plants are still growing and the newly formed tubers are not good candidates for storage. They can be identified by their nearly transparent skin and the fact that they are still rather skinny. Unripe dahlia tubers do not store well. They are much more susceptible to bruising and their thin skin is easily damaged by handling and cleaning. When they are mixed in with the more mature tubers, they can spread rot to tubers nearby. If you keep these tubers, store them in a separate bag or box.

(4) Broken necks. Many dahlia varieties have thin necks where the tuber attaches to the stem. If the neck is broken when you dig tubers, the tuber may look perfectly good but a very high percentage of these tubers (90% is good estimate) will rot or fail to sprout. Many varieties are notorious for having long slender tubers that easily get broken necks. Red Velvet and Jessica are two that come to mind. When digging these very long tubers, it may be better to trim them to shorter lengths as you dig them. A tuber with about 1/3 of its length cut off will store a lot better than a long skinny tuber with a broken neck.

(5) Curing of tubers before storage. I was surfing the internet and came across an article on how potato growers prepare their tubers for storage. There are numerous steps that they go through just to get the potatoes into a dormant stage. For example during digging and hauling to the storage area, potatoes are bruised and skin is damaged. Potatoes need to have some time (two to three weeks) in reasonably warm and dry conditions to heal these defects. Then they are slowly reduced in temperature before going into storage. Do these steps apply to dahlias? I believe they do. After you harvest and divide tubers, they need to be in a special environment to heal and go into the dormant state. It should not be too humid or too dry. The tubers need to

heal bruises and to have the skins thicken. When fully cured, storage success will be improved.

(6) How wet and cold is it when you are digging? In the Northwest, there may be weeks of rain during the digging season. In Montana, the humidity may be very low. Dahlias need to be handled differently in different conditions. In the Northwest, wet tuber clumps need to be divided very soon after digging. The wet tubers need to be dried before storage.

(7) Peat Moss, vermiculite, cedar shavings, newspaper, perforated plastic bags, small plastic bags, saran wrap, sand, wax, saw dust, etc. Dahlias have been successfully

stored in all of these mediums and probably many more. The medium itself may not be the answer but how you use the medium. No one talks much about whether tubers are stored touching each other. I believe that separation of tubers from each other is as important as the storage medium. For example, vermiculite can be used to separate the tubers in the storage container. Saran wrap and the like does the same job with much reduced storage space. Separation of tubers and the preservation of proper moisture in storage are key factors. But when using any of the storage methods, a rotten tuber can create problems for other tubers in storage. It produces excess moisture and even some gases that affect tubers in the same area. Rotten tubers probably attract insects. Rotten tubers can harbor secondary bacterial and fungus that can spread to adjacent tubers. A good practice is to check tubers in storage several times during the winter and to remove rotting tubers.

(8) Little attention is given to insect damage in storage. Very small insects such as fungus gnats and spring tails lay eggs in tubers and the larva eat tuber parts. The green eye is very susceptible to such damage. Prevention of infection is a good practice. If the weather is warm when digging, be aware of small flying insects. Do not dry tuber clumps in an area such as a greenhouse where warm dry conditions encourage insects. Using an insecticide dip may be very helpful. One grower fumigates his storage area with flea bombs.

(9) Pot tubers are insurance. Many varieties that have poor keeping tubers can be grown as "pot tubers" and stored quite successfully. Generically, a pot tuber is an entire tuber clump of a dahlia that was grown in a pot the entire year. The size of the pot can range from a gallon

pot all the way down to a 2 inch pot. The bigger the pot, the bigger the clump will be. Commercial entities that sell pot tubers use small pots that are in the range of 3 to 6 inches in width. In the Spring take a cutting or use a small tuber and grow it in a pot somewhere in your garden. It can be placed on the soil in the garden or grown on a table or bench. They just need regular water and a very little bit of liquid fertilizer. In the Fall, harvest your pot tubers before the first frost as they are much more susceptible to freezing. Cut off the stem an inch or two above the pot and either store them in the pot or out of the pot. I store mine in the pots.

SOCIETY NOTES

November's meeting will be the last regular meeting for this year. We will get together the second Tuesday of December at our regular meeting spot for our annual Christmas Party. There will be a December issue of the Bulletin around the first of December. There will be no Bulletin or meeting for the month of January and our regular meeting and publication schedule will resume in February of 2013.



From left to right: Hollyhill Valentino, Hollyhill Electra and Hollyhill Shaggydog

THOUGHTS ON DIGGING AND DIVIDING

By Ted Kennedy

One of the great advantages of dahlias is that they have tubers and that the plants grown from those tubers will be just the same every year. One of the disadvantages of dahlias is that dahlias do best when dug and divided each year. I am writing this short article to touch on the basics of digging and dividing dahlia clumps.

The first question that most beginners ask is: “**When should I dig my dahlias?**”

There is a lot of misinformation on his topic and the biggest myth is that you should dig your dahlias after a killing frost. Dahlias can be dug and stored successfully in our area any time after October 1st which is usually many weeks before a frost. There is little advantage to waiting for our first frost that occurs usually about the 31st of October each year.

Having said that, some say that the tubers do get larger during that month or so before the first frost.

While that may be true there are many negatives in waiting to dig. Here in Oregon, the Fall rains usually start about September 15th and increase in severity every week thereafter until they reach their maximum about December 1st. Dahlias dug before the soil is over saturated store better. We like to dig our dahlias in October and finish in the first week of November. There are nearly always some nice dry days during this period and it is usually not very cold either.

What is the first step? Phil Mingus always goes into his field and cuts down the dahlia stalks a few days (or as long as week) before he digs them. He does this because the tuber clumps will respond to the loss of the stalks by swelling the eyes, making them easy to see. This is very advantageous especially for varieties that have difficult to see eyes. Whether you do this step or not, the stalks do need to be cut off the plants and removed before you dig them. We like to leave about 6-7 inches of the stalks on the tuber clumps so that you can use them as a handle during the lifting process. Then it is imperative that you label the clump before or just after you dig it. There are many ways to label the clumps and one of the easiest is to use flagging tape that is tightly tied to a stalk. We use the tag we placed near the clump and use a rubber band to tie the tag to the clump.

Digging the clumps: The best tool for digging dahlias is a spade (not a shovel). A spade has straight blade and a squared off bottom. Our spade is about 8 inches wide and about 12 inches long. It has a long handle like a shovel.

The dahlia clump needs to be loosened from the soil by pushing the spade into the soil on all four sides of the clump. If you do this properly, you will cut off the hair roots that hold the clump tightly to the soil. Then using the spade, the clump can be lifted and the stalks that you previously shortened, used as handle to pull the clump from the ground. If you have heavy soil, you may want to remove some of the soil from the top of the clump before you lift it out. Remove by hand as much of the soil from the clump being careful not disturb the tubers that must remain firmly attached to the stalks. If you allow the tubers to sag, the necks will break and the tubers will be worthless. Varieties that have long, skinny tubers must be treated carefully and it helps to remove the soil from the top of the clump before lifting as the heavy soil pushes down on the delicate tubers. I sometimes remove a tuber or two from these clumps even before the clump is lifted..

Washing the clumps before dividing: There are two ways to remove the excess soil from tuber clumps before dividing. The older method is to use a hose end sprayer and to gently spray the clumps to remove the dirt. During the cooler Fall weather this can be a cold and messy job. Usually, one waits until the end of the digging day to wash the tubers because you will get very wet and very cold. We have switched to using air from a compressor to clean off the tubers. We carry the labeled clumps in plastic boxes from the field to our garage where we stack them for a day or two or three before we divide them. Just before we divide, we take the tuber clump outside and use the air tool to remove the soil. Be sure to wear safety glasses when you do this. The tuber clumps are dry and a small coating of soil remains on them. This coating may even help them in storage.

Dividing tuber clumps: Whatever method or tools that you use, the goal is have a tuber that has at least one eye surrounded by enough tissue that it will store. Dahlias

vary greatly in the sizes and shapes of the tubers. Varieties that have short round tubers are the easiest to divide and store. Varieties that have long skinny tubers with delicate skinny necks can be stored but great care must be taken not to break or crack the neck of the tuber. Tubers that have broken or cracked necks will not sprout and should be discarded.

Eyes on the tubers are very near the area where the tuber attaches to the stalk. The goal is to cut the tuber off of the stalk with a small amount of stalk material around the eye. If too much stalk material is left on the tuber, it will tend to rot (stalks of dahlias tend to rot during storage). If too little material surrounds the eyes, the eyes may dry up and not store.

Using a knife (not recommended) or a pair of bonsai scissors (recommended) or a pair of good hand pruners, cut above and around on all sides of the tuber where it attaches to the stalk. Trim the material around the eyes so that about 1/4 inch of material surrounds the eye(s). Remove the tail of the tuber and all feeder roots with scissors. The tuber should now look nice and clean and are nearly ready to be stored.

Labeling tubers: Many people in the past used “No Blot” pencils to label individual tubers. This pencil has aniline dye where the graphite would be in a pencil. It is water soluble and makes an indelible ink. It is slightly poisonous and one should never put the pencil in your mouth. These aniline pencils are no longer being made by the original maker under the “No Blot” label. There are other companies that make them but they are not readily available and are very inferior. Nowadays, most people use “Sharpies” or rubber stamps to mark tubers. Sharpies work reasonably well on dry tubers but hardly at all on damp tubers. Those who use rubber stamps use a three digit number for each tuber variety and use the rubber stamps with changeable numbers. Either way the writing is very indelible and generally can be read on the tuber even after being grown for a season in the soil.

Some tips on dividing: Sometimes two tubers share the same eye. Do not separate them. Very small tubers do not store well. Tubers should be at least as big as your pinkie finger and preferably bigger than your thumb. Use loppers to cut the stalks off to the level of the first tubers. In many cases you will need to split the tuber clump in order to remove tubers. Use a stocky knife that has about a 5-6 inch blade to split the clumps. Insert the knife into the solid part of the stock and twist the knife to cause the clump to divide. Assemble several tools in

your dividing area. You will need a sharp set of scissors (cheap titanium scissors are best as they stay sharp), hand pruners, bonsai scissors, a stout knife, and full sized loppers. Use scissors to cutoff hair roots and tails. Use bonsai scissors as your main tool to remove tubers. Use hand pruners when the bonsai scissors are too small. Use the loppers to cut off the stalks.

After you divide the tubers, they need to dry before labeling (unless you are using a “No Blot” pencil). They also need to air dry to “cure” the tubers for storage. In dry weather the drying may take only a day or two but in wet weather two or three days is needed.



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