

# The Dahlia Society of Nova Scotia Quarterly Newsletter – APRIL 06



## What's New

Effective starting with the March 2006 meeting, Dahlia Society of NS meetings will be held at the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History at 1747 Summer St. in Halifax. Meetings will be on the **last Friday** of the month starting at 7:30 PM in the auditorium on the lower level. The evening entrance to the museum is from the parking lot on the south side. (See maps on Page 2)

The parking lot on the south side is a pay lot, monitored 24 hours a day by the QE II hospital across the street. We can use the free parking lot on the north side of the museum, except for the reserved spots. (During the day this parking lot is reserved for museum staff.) There is also free parking on the streets nearby, subject to restrictions during winter storms; usually there are spots available on Summer St. and Sackville St. near the public garden and on Trollope St (one way towards Bell) within 5 minutes walk.

## Bits & Pieces

Well, this has been a strange winter, to say the least! It was 12 C one day and -17 C the next. These sudden changes cannot be good for the perennials in our garden, let alone everyone's sanity. A lot of the farmers, in the area where we live, (Annapolis Valley) say that this coming summer will see an abundance of insect life. The temperatures are not cold enough for long enough to do much damage to the over-wintering insects. They are predicting a bumper crop of earwigs this year. Time to recondition the sprayer, me thinks.

We recently checked our dahlia tubers in storage and "touch wood" they all appear to be in good condition and look about the same as they did last month. It is important to check your dahlia tubers during the winter storage, just to get a jump start on any problems that may be occurring – like rot or drying out.

Every so often, I get the urge to get out in the garden. This happens on all of the warm, spring-like days. On the winter-like days, I am completely satisfied to read a few more chapters from my latest best read.

This summer will be busy for Lil and I, due to a family wedding and **my** agreement to supply flowers. This will be supplemented with our usual roadside sales and trying out a few new seedlings that I crossed last summer. I crossed BROOKSIDE SNOWBALL and FERNCLIFF ILLUSION and got at least 12 great looking seeds. Great looking seeds do not guarantee great looking flowers. Seeds that looked "formed" should be viable come spring, but time will tell.



## Program for 2006:

### Meeting Dates:

- March 31 – Preparing your dahlia bed & fertilizing
- April 28 – Tuber Auction - presented by Arthur Haskins & Carol Dexter, Auctioneer Heather Drope
- May 26 – Planting, Staking & a talk
- June 30 – Meeting at members place
- July & August – No meeting
- September 29 – Cutting, Storing tubers & seed collecting
- October 27 – Putting your garden to bed
- November 24 – Slide Show 2006
- December – No meeting

### Events:

- May 6 – Tuber Sale at Mic Mac Mall*
- June – Planting Dahlias at Veterans Memorial*
- July 23 – Annual Picnic at the Higgins*
- September 9 – Dahlia Show at the Bedford Place Mall*
- September 17 – Halifax City Garden tours:  
1:30 - 3:00 p.m. Public Gardens,  
Veterans Memorial & Heather Drope;  
2:30 - 4:00 p.m. Sherma Richards - refreshments*
- September ?? – Digging up tubers at Veterans Memorial*

We are looking for members who would like to tell us a little bit about themselves & their story on How & Why I grow Dahlias...it's just a 5 minute talk so call & we'll put you on the list.

Your Program Committee is always on the lookout for new ideas for the Program to keep it interesting for you – so please if you have any new or old ideas that you would like to see just give us a call.

John Cunningham            429-8173

Jack O'Neil                    477-8308

Sherma Richards            455-1783

## **Using Dahlias In Arrangements**

by Arthur Haskins

Are dahlias suitable for flower arranging? You bet they are. We do not see many dahlias used in commercial florists arrangements here in the Maritimes, but that is not the case in other areas. There seems to be a reluctance by florists here to use dahlia blooms, this may be due to lack of knowledge of the flower, but more likely it is due to not having a reliable supply of quality dahlia blooms available to use in arrangements. A regional director with the American Dahlia Society who is from the United States Midwest mentioned that last year there were over 200 “dahlias only” wedding floral requests to local florists in his area, that is saying something about the increasing popularity of dahlias as a mainstream cut flower. In the Pacific Northwest where dahlias are very popular you see huge displays of cut dahlias for sale in the markets and stores and many floral arrangements feature dahlia blooms. It is nice to see that the popularity of the dahlia as a cut flower is spreading beyond the Northwest.

To attain the best quality of dahlia blooms for arrangements a specified process has to be followed. Choose quality blooms that are three quarters open, cut the blooms early in the morning before it gets too hot, cut them with a sharp knife and put the stems into warm water in clean containers right in the garden, a floral preservative or bleach can be added to the water at this time to help control bacteria and provide a bit of nourishment. Move the buckets of blooms to a cool dark area for at least four hours to harden them off. After this the blooms are ready to use in arrangements or vases and you will find that the blooms last much longer if you use this treatment. A little tip here about cutting single, orchid or collarett flowers, cut them just as they begin to open and place in water, cutting at this early stage helps the petals stay on much longer, blooms that are cut fully open have a tendency to lose their petals.

Many great dahlia blooms that may be overlooked for use as specimen blooms on the show bench are quite suitable for arrangement purposes. Blooms that are top bloomers for instance are very valuable to an arranger to attain certain angles in the arrangement. The smaller blooming varieties seem to be the best choice for arranging but if you are making a large display for a hall or church be sure to use the large blooms to add balance and scale to the display. Generally the larger blooms are placed at the bottom of the arrangement and the medium sizes in the middle and the smaller ones at the top, this gives balance to the display. If using all the same variety use mature blooms at the base, three quarter open blooms in the middle and partially open or even buds showing color near the top to give this balance to the display. Before placing the hardened off flowers in an arrangement be sure to cut all the stems again before placing them in the arrangement or vase. Try to avoid blooms that have very large stems if possible, these tend to take up a lot of room in the oasis block and makes it harder to get all the flowers and foliage in properly. Leave your arrangement in a cool place until it is ready to be placed in position, this will help increase the vase life of the blooms as well. The dahlias will continue to drink, so be sure to add water to the arrangement dish before placement and check it every day after that to ensure your dahlias look their best.

## **President's Message**

John Proctor

Every year the tuber sale, BBQ, and dahlia show are the Dahlia Society's main events. Over the years there also has been a lot of society participation in the Musquodoboit Exhibition, specifically in the dahlia section of their flower show. In recent years the society has also been planting a bed of dahlias at the veteran's hospital in Halifax, and digging them up in the fall. These events require a significant club effort.

There are many ways to help with the tuber sales even if you do not have extra tubers to contribute. For the sale, our tables, posters and boxes of tubers have to be carried into the mall. Tables and the display have to be set up, tubers arranged in boxes for the customers to search through, and the boxes have to be continually refilled to restock the tables, if you can make your way through the shoulder to shoulder customers. Growers who bring hundreds of tubers to the sale will have spent long hours packaging and labeling them, often late into the night before, and many of them will have been up extra early to load their vehicle for the trip to the sale, so they will appreciate help bringing their tubers into the mall and enough others being present to help with the customers that they can take a well earned break. Customers need advice on selecting and growing dahlias, with finding particular dahlias or forms or colours, and often want to know cultural information like how soon they can be planted, staking, and how to store them over the winter. And at the end of the day, the display has to be disassembled and, along with the tables and left over tubers, loaded back into members' vehicles.

The yearly dahlia show is also a large effort. As for the tuber sale, even if you do not have blooms to enter in the show, assistance is needed in many ways and will be very much appreciated. The Show Chairman has overall responsibility for seeing that everything from the vases and oasis are ready, to organizing dahlia sections on tables, and directing exhibitors and judges, to handling the media, proceeds in an orderly and fair manner. The event swings into high gear early Friday evening from setting up the tables and running until the vases are packed into someone's truck on Saturday. Tablecloths and section numbers have to be placed on the show tables, and vases filled with water to soak the oasis. Some exhibitors may have been cutting blooms long after dark the night before and will have been up well before dawn, packing their vehicles for a long drive to the show. Some will bring a full load of blooms Friday evening and then return with another load early Saturday. Growers who bring dozens of blooms can use help with bringing their blooms into the mall to the staging area, with carting their staged blooms and arrangements to the show tables, and placement of the entries on the tables. Judges and clerks are needed to adjudicate the hundreds of blooms on Saturday morning. No experience is needed to be a clerk. And at the end of the day, usually the blooms are sold, the tables have to be cleared, and the vases emptied of oasis, repacked in boxes and reloaded into one or more members' trucks. For beginners who have never entered blooms in a dahlia show, helping with any of these aspects is an excellent way to learn how to do it. Helping as a clerk is a great way to learn what the judges are looking for in a winning bloom.

For both the tuber sale and the show, there are other activities that have to be carried out in advance. The event has to be booked with the mall, the contract forms must be completed and returned with proof of insurance, and publicity must be done.

The summer BBQ in July is another great opportunity to meet other members, ask questions, and to inspect a dahlia garden, as well as to sample delicious food. The topic of manure is usually a favourite subject for detailed discussion at the annual BBQ. I am surprised no one has ever brought samples. Besides help needed with the food and cleaning up afterwards, the BBQ usually has also been a time to get a group to fill the show vases with oasis for the upcoming show.

The newsletter is also an opportunity to take an actively participate in the society. While the newsletter editor role should be one of collecting contributions and assembling them in the newsletter, and seeing that notes of events are included in a timely manner, unfortunately for many years it has fallen to our editors to write much, if not all, of the newsletter. Contributions from everyone would be of interest and appreciated, and not just by the editor.

You might also participate by running for one of our positions of responsibility, such as program committee

(who would appreciate your suggestions!), publicity, ADS rep, secretary, treasurer, newsletter editor, or even vice president or president. Remember this is a club, and there are many eager to help anyone who is willing to take on one of these leadership roles.

Dahlia society events involve a substantial team effort and provide a great opportunity to participate actively in the society, meet and work with other members, to discuss and learn many aspects and challenges of growing dahlias, to share your knowledge, and to practice your speaking, writing and leadership skills. Participating is the way to get the most from the society. Experienced members are always generous with their help and advice. And more hands make the work lighter for everyone. We hope to see you at our next event!

(902) 461-1741 (john.proctor@dal.ca)

## **Border/Container Dahlias**

**Brian Hiscock**

Spring fever has sprung and my hands are itchy to get at my dahlia tubers. Last year I thought I would try planting some of the border/container dahlias sold in the local garden centers, and was I impressed with the results. Even though we had a wet spring, I finally did get my tubers in the ground around the seventh of July. I planted the short dahlias in front of my regular dahlias. The rows were 200 feet long and I planted the low growing dahlias one foot apart. This year I plan on using them as a landscape flower mixed in with other types of flowers or in color groups. They do look nice in clusters of the same variety with taller varieties in the background.

My first display of dahlias was the Gallery Series. They pumped out the blooms up until I dug them. The majority of the gallery series are 12 to 14 inches tall and very bushy. The plants were consistently covered with bloom once they started to flower. I hilled around the plants and was surprised that the winds of the Northumberland Strait did not knock them over. My favorite varieties of the Gallery Series were **Art Nouveau** (lavender double orchid), **Art Fair** (white double orchid), **Cobra** (clear orange at the upper side of the petals and warm orange-red at the underside), **Pablo** (bicolor with warm yellow in the centre, going to salmon-orange at the tops of the flower petals), **Rembrandt** (nice lilac-rose, at the top of the petals a tip of green-white which gives the unfolding flower a special aspect) and **Singer** (deep-red color). I should mention that I did get carried away with the low growing dahlias; I grew nine varieties of the Gallery Series plus twelve other border type dahlias ranging from cactus to anemones. I was impressed with a pink collarette that had a white collar and yellow center called **Famosa**, it is part of the Butterfly "Impression" series, and the monarch butterflies loved it. The Butterfly Dahlias are short, bushy plants 16 -20 inches tall that cover themselves with beautiful blooms-- lush overlapping petals with a corona or second row of shorter petals decorating the center. This inner row of top petals is the "butterfly" on each flower.

I was impressed with the low growing cactus varieties that I grew. **Park Princess** (pink), **Prince Charming** [sport of Park Princess] (white), **Star's Lady** (white with a lavender blush), **Playa Blanca** (creamy white), **Yellow Happiness** (soft yellow), plus two other varieties which were rose and red. They grew to about 22 inches tall, were bushy and pumped the blooms out right up till frost. Playa Blanca and Yellow Happiness are great for flower arrangements. I bought the tubers at Canadian Tire.

There was one downfall, when I dug the tubers I ended up with pencil tubers. It was late when I planted, plus the fact that the plants bloomed there hearts out. In other years, people would slow down their vehicles to view

the dahlias. This year, quite a few of them stopped. The day I started digging the tubers, I looked up to see a vanload of women heading my way with their mouths wide open. At first I thought someone gave them my address and they were impressed with me, but sad to say, they were only interested in my dahlias. Ha! Ha! The dahlias did look impressive with the four to five foot varieties planted behind the shorter ones. The low-growing varieties were covered with bloom, which gave a massive display of color. For a change, why not try a few low growing dahlias in your garden this year? God willing, I plan on growing more of the border dahlias this summer.

DAHLIA SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA: New Member/Membership Renewal Form  
DSNS dues are \$5.00 single and \$7.00 for family in Canadian funds, per year.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ APT \_\_\_\_\_

City/Town \_\_\_\_\_

Province/State \_\_\_\_\_

Country \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and or E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Single: (\$5.00) \_\_\_\_\_ Family: (\$7.00) \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to the: DAHLIA SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA

Mail to: David Steele  
574 Gospel Road  
R.R. #5, Canning  
Nova Scotia, B0P 1H0