

# The Dahlia Society of Nova Scotia Quarterly Newsletter

Edited by Nina Dandurand March 2008



Many of us have been planning our garden for the coming year with emphasis on new varieties as well as ideas for getting better results from the plants we start. There have been some questions on several areas that have come up in meetings and while talking to our various gardening friends. What can we plant in the raised beds and how can we make the pots we would like to plant look much better than they have been in the past? Our garden has many pots for no other reason than I like the look of them and they can make a great impact when some of the garden seems to be a bit lazy at certain times of the year.

Dahlias in pots are so interesting to do. I don't mean the large dahlias that are in the four, five and six foot range of dahlia plants but the shorter more compact plants are better suited to pots and go very well with other plantings. There are rules that should be followed when planning pots and if you stick to at least some of these rules you will have success that will make you pleased with the effort you have put forward. When you are using large pots of about 26 inches and plus in diameter or even a smaller one if that is all you have, the rule of thumb is to put something spiky, something round, and something trailing. If you find a daylily that you like, put it in the pot for the first season and this will make your spiky plant, dahlias are certainly the "round" plant needed with variegated or plain ivy that will trail in your pot.

If you put your blooming plants in the pot, try and make them all in the same colour family. As an example a yellow daylily, a soft yellow dahlia and variegated ivy will make more of an impact than if you planted each plant a different colour. The human eye rests more on this concept than having it take in bits and pieces of colour. Are you having a hard time believing me? Well, just try this idea one year and see if you like it better than all sorts of colour in one area. Another idea would be to plant a pink daylily and a dahlia like Park Princess then a trailing pink geranium. This will make a very nice "pot arrangement" Put this near a door or the bottom of some steps and see how you like it. Pots can be fun to make but one year I had nearly thirty pots around the property. Watering can become a chore if you get that enthusiastic so try and take that into consideration when you get on a roll and plant too many.

When you are planting in large pots, remember, you don't need to fill the entire pot with soil. I may put a pot up side down in the bottom of the pot to avoid filling with soil and then put the rest of the space with soil and plant material. When the season is over I put the soil into one of the gardens to build up that garden. Nothing goes to waste in our garden. Fertilizing and watering at regular intervals is important especially if you have the large plastic pots. These pots do get warmer in the sun than a terra cotta clay pot. The larger the pot the better it is for your pot arrangement. To move these pots around and save your back try moving them with a dolly.

**While you were absent:** The January meeting had the new executive taking the meeting. A discussion on what the club would name as “Flower of the Year” left everyone thinking so we are to submit our choices at the next meeting. The choice will have to be one that most people grow and can enable most of our members to grow the variety. I am looking forward to hearing what the verdict will be.

Our program was so interesting with Arthur Haskins giving a talk on the “Evolution of a Garden. Pictures showed us the progress of this garden that just happened to be his own. Each year Arthur added, edited and added some more to his garden. His dahlia patch started out small but now is a beautiful feature in his garden. It proved to all of us that a garden is always a work in progress and we have to be patient to all the setbacks we encounter if we are to achieve something we will cherish.

The February meeting was a crisp and cold night but we all managed to get there in one piece. Our speaker was Joe Markonjic from Sea Boost. He was there to inform us about the advantages of using this natural fertilizer. He showed us the many products he carried from the fish fertilizers to the slug and bug powder. The product Sea Boost is used as a foliar spray and will be absorbed quickly through the foliage of the plant. Along with this product there is a natural spray for eliminating weeds and unwanted grasses.

Gardeners across the province have seen the Sea Boost product for several years at the annual convention but dahlia growers who never go to that event are not aware of it at all. I suppose it pays to attend the convention. He was generous enough to leave us with samples to try. This can also be used on houseplants. The product gives the plant a very healthy glow; at least mine are looking extremely healthy. We have used this for several years and I just wanted to share that fact with everyone so they could try it too.

## **Understanding Colour**

We are speaking about colour this month. This will give us time to think about colour we use in our outdoor projects and plan what we want to do for this year. I have a colour wheel that is useful in the plans I have for my pots that are planted. I want to make a colour wheel as simple as possible so if you are an artist please forgive this simplistic discussion.

There are three primary colours and they are red, yellow and blue. Every other colour is a mixture of at least one of these with white being added or black being added to change the depth of the original colour. If you can find yourself a colour wheel you will notice the wheel is divided into two distinct camps. Warm (this has yellow added to these colours) and Cool (these have blue added to them) If you will notice the divide of the wheel you will see that if you have blue and orange side by side they will be called complementary colours. This certainly doesn't mean they complement each other what it means is each colour appears brighter. The blue appears bluer and the orange appears really bright.

Colours are arranged by the gardener in combinations of a manner that will create a desired ambiance. Three steps to colour planning are to determine how many colours are needed to create the mood you wish to achieve. Select a dominant colour from which to build your plan. Select other colours in the scheme according to the following colour relationships. Monochromatic colours are colours of the same colour family. Related colour schemes are colours with shades that lie beside each other on the colour wheel. These will give a more calming effect than complementary colours will do and also a richer feel than a monochromatic colour scheme.

Along with your choice of colours it is a good idea to add stability and balance to your plan by adding white, black or gray. If you can use even a small number of these ideas you will find a difference in the look of your gardens or pots.

## *My First Seedling* – Submitted by Barry Mackenzie

It was with much anticipation when I dug my tuber clumps last fall because two in particular had me excited. They were my first ever seedling clumps and I was hoping for lots of good tubers within them.

It all started a few years ago after visiting Joe Lapierre and witnessing his success while breeding Dahlias. He showed me jars of water full of Dahlia flower stems, their flower petals removed and explained that they would be used to fertilize his chosen seed parents that were still on the plant in the garden.

I've always liked formal decorative flowers, so pure in shape, their petals curving back into the stem. Three in particular caught my eye; Bristol Spartan, a miniature dark red bloom, Danjo Doc, a 4-6 inch dark red bloom and Midnight Sun, a 4-6 inch yellow bloom. What made Midnight Sun special to me was its dark green, almost black foliage. I figured that if I could successfully cross two of the three flowers I might wind up with a flame coloured bloom with black foliage.

I watched the Dahlia Society's propagation video over and over again and finally, armed with my pruners, jars of water and ankle stockings I was ready to go. The stockings were used to cover the seed parent between pollen coats to keep the bees away, in case anyone was wondering... I selected Midnight Sun as the seed parent and cut stems from pollen ready Bristol Spartan and Danjo Doc. As the stamens opened on each of the parent plants I was ready to gently dust them individually with one of the two red flowers. As the petals closed on my Midnight Suns I labeled them and cut them for drying and hopefully seed selection. After a few weeks, I actually managed to get 7 seeds, all of which germinated in April 2007. My little seedlings slowly grew with frequent watering of "no-damp" to keep them from keeling over and all managed to survive by the time I finally planted them out at the end of May. They grew all summer long into magnificent bushes then they started to produce flowers.

Well, one plant produced lots of flowers that looked like 'Cornel', another's blooms were just not right and a third kept blowing its centers. So, one by one, I yanked those that I thought were inferior and kept two that had consistently produced good Decorative flowers that were more of a 'blend' in colour, putting out lots of yellow/red blooms. As it turns out, each of the clumps I kept were from Danjo Doc and Bristol Spartan.

It must have taken me two hours to separate those clumps because, initially, there were no eyes visible (gasp). Well a snip here and a slice there produced 12 tubers from each plant (whew). They are all put away now in my 'totes' full of vermiculite where they'll rest over winter in the basement. This spring will signal the onset of another growing season and I just know I'll be excited about what kind of seedlings my tubers will produce. Hopefully, I'll have some flowers for one of our shows because that is really the only way to measure their merit.

Sure hope I don't have to compete with Joe.

## **Coloring Your Dahlia Garden**

**By Arthur Haskins**

I recently had a conversation with a fellow dahlia society member in which he said there have been no printed articles about designing your dahlia garden by color. I thought about that a bit and decided to stick my neck out and give a few ideas about some things you might want to try when arranging dahlia varieties in your garden.

A dahlia planting that is laid out in straight rows like a vegetable garden can still be made aesthetically more appealing by staggering the layout of stakes from one row to another to help break up the formal straight lines. Depending on how the garden is viewed, one sided or in the round, you can plant all the tall varieties at the back in a one -sided garden and gradually plant shorter ones towards the front of the bed, or in the round, plant the tall ones in the center and shorter ones out from that.

Now, for some color ideas why not try bright colors such as brilliant yellows, flames, bright oranges and reds can be planted towards the rear of the bed so as to show up better from a distance, the pastel colored dahlias need to be planted a bit closer to appreciate their softer hues of color, and the very dark colors need to be planted as close to the front as possible so as to be able to actually see the contours of the petals with such dark colors. There is something called a color wheel, but not being a graduate of the Martha Stewart School of Design I never really understood it, so lets not go there. There are however colors that complement one another and there are others that contrast with each other, I did get that part of the color wheel thing. The trick however is to know which combination to use. I like bright yellows and pure whites in my dahlia patch, as they match up well with the darker red and purple colors and make a nice contrast; they also show up better at dusk when other colors begin to fade. Dull yellows and gray whites however are not nearly as effective but can still look very nice if they have a blush or are mixed with other softer pastel colors. Individual dahlias planted in a mixed flower garden as specimen plants quite often fit in better if they are of pastel colors as this most often fits the color scheme developed by the designer. To draw special attention to a particular part of the garden just plant a bright flame colored dahlia, visitors will be drawn immediately to that spot. The dahlia patch is a bit different though, we want to showcase our dahlias and a mass planting is the best way to accomplish this, and we really want the colors to be impressive, so going with a number of groupings of colors that are contrasting separated by groupings of pastel shades should give us the desired effect. Try not to put too many of the same variety together, and be careful when placing similar colors side by side, red for instance, the brightest color will most often dominate and make the others less attractive, try to separate them using other colors. Try planting dark colors in front of lighter colors as they will show up better and try not to plant short dark colored dahlias in front of tall dahlias as the dark blooms against the green background of leaves from the taller dahlias is usually not a great contrast.

In closing, they say the color red signifies intensity and emotion, orange represents enthusiasm and determination, yellow is joy and happiness, and purple is associated with perfection. I guess that's why dahlia growers plant all of these colors as they describe us perfectly.

## **FLOWER OF THE YEAR**

The flower of the year for 2008 will be Cobequid Frosty. This particular dahlia is a dahlia from Carol Dexter. Each person can grow this variety and at the society show in September all those wishing to do so may enter it. There is nothing nicer than to see a large number of “flower of the year” dahlias entered to display to the public. If anyone needs this dahlia indicate this at the meeting and I am sure the tubers will be given for you to grow.

### **Programs and events to be noted**

March program	March 28, 7:30 pm	Dahlia cuttings
April program	April 25, 7:30 pm	Club Tuber Auction
May Event	May 3, 8:30 am	Annual Tuber sale at the Mic Mac Mall
May program	May 27, 7:30 pm	New Varieties of Dahlias grown
June event	June 7 –8	NSAGC Convention in Truro (see explanation**)
June program	June 25, 7:30 pm	Containers with dahlias

\*\* The Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs is holding their annual convention in Truro, June 7-8. This is a gathering of all garden clubs in Nova Scotia and a time to meet with gardeners we know and those whom we have never met. It is always a good thing to make new friends. This convention sports lectures given by knowledgeable people on various topics ensuring there is something for everyone that weekend.

Along with the lectures there are vendors who have lots of plants and items related to gardening for sale. I always like this part of it. It is a great time to pick up, as an example, the newest daylily or the best hosta in the land. How do you get to go to this event is probably your next question. Well, you can go on the NSAGC website and get your information there with a registration form. If you are interested make the time to get your registration in early because I am sure the rooms will go fast. If you have any questions about this just email me at [Carolina@ns.sympatico.ca](mailto:Carolina@ns.sympatico.ca) and I will give you all the help I can with this. If you don't have email you can call me at 1 902 847 3255. Members of the Nova Scotia Dahlia Society are able to go to this event because we are an affiliate to the NSAGC. This convention is held in different parts of the province each year.

Dahlia Society members are also able to attend District meetings held in the designated districts throughout the province. Do you need more information on that subject? Contact me at the above contact numbers.

## Profiles in Wonderment

The other day I just happened to be speaking to Alice Dempsey, a member of our Dahlia Society. At one time or another I often wonder what it was that makes a person start this dahlia journey we are on, so I asked Alice that very question. Initially her father grew dahlias so she has memories of dahlias in her family garden while she was growing up.

Now, Alice doesn't live very far from Joe LaPierre who is a grower of dahlias and has been for some years. His dahlias attracted her to the garden and in time Joe gave Alice some to try in her garden. She grows all sorts of plants besides dahlias but it was interesting to her to put these tubers in the ground and see what she could accomplish. In 1997 the Dempsey garden had tubers planted and growing with the hope of having some flowers to enjoy. The first attempt, according to Alice went well but after seeing what the wind could do to dahlia plants she realized staking them would be a better way to get results. Each year new varieties were tried and before long she was growing about 150 plants. The large AA and A size were to keep her interest and so a collection began.

Some of the favourites of this lady are Sir Alf Ramsey, Kidd's Climax, Cyril Higgo, and Islander. There is always room for more and always a keen interest in the newest dahlia. One only has to attend the tuber auction to know how Alice's dahlia interest has grown. I remember being at the flower show of the Halifax Westmoreland Garden Club when Alice brought in her blooms to show. She was nervous because she hadn't entered in shows very much in the past but she did very well and has continued to do very well with each year that passes. Good for you Alice. We all look forward to the many blooms you will bring to the future shows we will have.

If you would like to comment on anything in the newsletter please feel free to call me at 902 847 3255 or write me a note at  
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