

Dahlia Society of Nova Scotia Fall/Winter Newsletter

Edited by Nina Dandurand March 2010



Would you believe we are in 2010!!! We all are looking forward to a new season of growing with some veterans in the group thinking of new tubers they will grow and the new members in our group just hoping they will like what they grow. In any society or club there are always those who have been there for what seems to be forever and this can have an effect on the new members who never did grow dahlias and want so much to learn. For you new folks we are so happy to see you and to get the opportunity to pass along all the information we have so you will enjoy your flowers as much as we do. No question is too simple and no answer is ever complete. Just make yourself at home and call the society yours and enjoy the fun.

From time to time we want to hear from you to ask what it is you want to know about this wonderful flower but we can't know your question unless you ask. If you are shy just email me and I will work your question and answer in a newsletter article. Some of the questions I have had sent to me over the years are very interesting. To be honest I never thought about asking them so when they were asked it made me stop and think about the reason one would need to know that particular information. Some of us are fortunate to have great soil to grow our dahlias while others have to work at the process and this can be so very frustrating. It is all well and good for me to say we have great success but in a sense our society doesn't have complete success until every member can grow those dahlias to a standard they will enjoy and be proud of.

Executive of the Nova Scotia Dahlia Society

President: Carol Dexter	902 668 2921
VicePresident: Joyce Higgins	902 384 2764
Secretary: Jack O'Neill	902 477 8308
Treasurer: Arthur Haskins	902 6682838

Events

- March 10th Meeting – Captain William Spry Community Center – 7 pm - Spryfield
April 14th Meeting – Captain William Spry Community Center – 7 pm – Spryfield
This will be a meet and greet for new members
May 1st Tuber sale at the Mic Mac Mall starts early – 8:30 am
May 12th Meeting – Captain William Spry Community Center – 7 pm – Spryfield
Tuber auction will be held at the May meeting
June 9th Meeting – Captain William Spry Community Center – 7 pm - Spryfield

Taking A Look At What We Have Stored

The time has arrived to open the containers and look at what has been stored. If you see any rot in the container take it out as this will only spread and make the other tubers rot as well. Make sure you have a small journal to make a note of when you opened the container and what the greeting was you received. As an example, did you see great tubers in good health or did you see a ball of mush? Hopefully you saw what you wanted to see. There is a chance the most favourite variety didn't make the winter storage and this won't make you happy. Try and think of who may be growing this variety, get in touch with them and see how their variety did in storage. Perhaps with a bit of luck they may have one you can get from them.

Once the storage mystery is over you can start to plan when you are going to put the tubers in the trays to start them growing before you put them out. We always do this for several reasons. The idea is to see if the tubers are good and will grow, maybe the tuber looks good on the outside and is not as good on the inside so checking with a growing start will save you from planting something not worth your time. There are some tubers that have a habit of taking their time to push out the growing eyes and may need a little help. I put them in a warm place for a while and then check them. It is a good chance they are starting to grow. If they are not growing and need a little bit more of a push I put them in a plastic bag and spray them with water and place them in a warm area. This usually helps. Some of the varieties I find that need that extra push are Spartacus, Clyde's Choice and a few of the AA varieties. I realize this may be excessive but I like those varieties so I will take the trouble to do the extra for them but if I am not liking the variety that much they may only get one chance at showing they want to live. New varieties are fun to try.

The Great Dahlia Tuber Sale

The Dahlia Society of Nova Scotia has held a tuber sale for the past twenty years on the first Saturday of May at the Mic Mac Mall. This is something we always mark on our calendar and then we start to look in the classification book and to re-read the American Dahlia Society Bulletins to get an idea what is new in the dahlia world. There has been a build up of tuber varieties over those years with many varieties coming and going. Some varieties have stayed the course because they didn't fall out of favour and they are varieties able to hold the competitive edge over many others. Now, we are not talking just about competition so if you don't want to compete, that is just fine but someone has to do it or we would never know if these varieties can stand up to a good solid test.

If you are interested in certain forms of dahlias you may want to ask members working the event to show you where those forms can be found, especially if you are new to the sale. Come early because tubers go fast. There is an enthusiastic crowd with very sharp elbows. If you have been attending any of the club meetings you will have had a chance to ask what varieties some members have as favourites and why they think the way they do. If a member has a few extras of that variety you may be passed some to try but if you haven't come to the meetings that option may be closed to you until you get to know everyone better.

When the catalogues arrive in January, members buy new varieties for themselves to build their collection. These varieties are exhibition tubers and do cost considerably more than the tuber sale. The members who have extras from their catalogue purchases put them in the tuber sale to help raise funds for the club. The society also buys new tubers so we can have a chance to grow them. These new varieties are being grown by selected members for a few years before they are offered at the tuber sale so the society can build the stock for the members and these are offered the first year at the auction held at the meeting in April however, this year the auction will be held at the May meeting. This May meeting will be held at our new venue, The William Spry Community Center in Spryfield located just off Sussex Street in Spryfield.

The show or display at the Mic Mac Mall in the fall will give you an enormous array of choice in the dahlia world. If you did attend and wrote down what you would like to have, these could be at the sale as well. So, there is a lot of opportunity to acquire new dahlias of better quality. Remember, it is just as easy to grow a good dahlia in the same space you would grow a mediocre one. Another place to see a mass of dahlias is at the Halifax Exhibition held in August in Middle Musquodoboit. The summer newsletter will have the dates for all shows and exhibitions you may want to attend. The Nova Scotia Dahlia Society supports the Public Gardens and supplies them with tubers for the gardens. The staff at the Public Gardens does a superb job in the outlay of the dahlia beds and allows the public to approach the beds to take pictures and study the blooms.

Having your heart set on owning a certain dahlia then not finding it at the sale can be disappointing but when you attend the meetings and talk to the members you may have someone take pity on you and see you get one. I have been very fortunate, as many people have taken pity on me through the years. In kind you may have something they don't have and an exchange can be orchestrated. Try it! You'll like it!!!!

Planting your Tubers

Begin growing your tubers by starting them in trays with Pro Mix. Lay the tubers in the trays and mist them. This is a good way to make sure you know if the tuber is good or not and it is a way to enable you to have dahlias blooming sooner than if you put the tubers in the ground.

Sometimes the soil is cooler than we would like it to be to start the tubers growing well and this will just make the tuber sit in the ground not giving it a good growing start.

Prepare your ground – Make sure you have your soil prepared by adding organic material to the existing soil. A good rule of thumb is to remember to put in what the plant has taken out. This way the plant will always have good nutrients to allow them to grow and flourish.

Staking your dahlias – You should always stake your dahlias because this prevents them from being broken down by the wind. Measure a distance of 4 feet between stakes if you are planting them in a row. This allows you to be able to work around the plant and since you will be planting two dahlias to a stake you will need the room for those plants to stretch and grow. To grow a dahlia in a cramped space is not the best because it can cause mildew problems because the air cannot circulate properly. If you have a method that works for you that is wonderful but these rules of thumb are best for most varieties.

Labels for your dahlias - What to use? You can use labels purchased from the nursery but I find the use of old blinds a good choice. Each strip of the blind is cut in three sections and a hole is drilled in the top of each section so the wire you are going to use to fasten the tag to the stake can be attached to the tag then attached to the stake.

Write on the tag with a permanent sharpie pen. You can turn the tag towards the inside of the stake so the sun won't fade the tag or you can take a chance and have faith in your permanent sharpie pen. I write down the rows of dahlias planted in a book just in case the labels fade this way I will be able to re-write the name of the variety if I have to do that.

Plant the tubers with the growing end towards the stake and start tying the growing plant to the stake when you see they have three sets of leaves.

The one of the biggest mistakes many make is not giving the tubers enough water. No plant can take any goodness from the soil to the plant without adequate water. The water you give your plant helps cool the plant in hot weather. Water the plants from the bottom and you may want to use a fertilizer such as Sea Boost to help them along. Remember the tuber you have this year will be the plant you have next year so feed them and water them well.

Dwindling Numbers

There is a loud lament concerning the numbers in our clubs and societies. This is all over the country it seems no matter what sort of club it may be. As a former director of the Nova Scotia Association of Garden Clubs I was tasked to visit the clubs in my area and hear their concerns. They all said it was hard to attract new members and the members in their clubs were tired. Their flower show participation was declining with the same few people entering the events held each year. The main reason a flower show is held is to show the public what can be grown and perhaps interest them in the various varieties. A club can gain members this way. It is thought by the small group of members if they don't try everything to attract new members the club would never be revived. It is true it is more difficult to revive a lost tradition than keep it going and hope for a change of mind of the masses.

One conclusion I have arrived at is we do attract new members but they come to one meeting telling their families, "I will go and see what it is all about". They kept their end of the bargain and we lost them with "Hello". We tell them how much fun they will have exhibiting their blooms. Entering the Olympics before you can run is a tall order to fill. Then, there is the resident know it all who corners the poor soul and spouts his wondrous feats of exhibition excellence. Granted we have many degrees of experience in our societies but we are only as strong as our weakest link. We sometimes forget the person may have great experience in another facet of horticulture but is a novice with dahlias. Making them feel they are in over their head is a sure way for them to head for the door. Their first visit is curiosity. Never assume these wonderful folk know nothing about horticulture because that would be a mistake.

It is hard to work to build a society with new members because most have busy lives and the last thing anyone is looking for is more pressure. They need to gain the love of their slow success one step at a time. More experienced members can advise and maybe visit the new member's garden where the novice can ask questions and feel very comfortable discussing their progress.

Most people don't like to be judged. This is a concept that can make some squirm and make them leave quickly if they think they are expected to exhibit. Societies have to have a few who will exhibit because the blooms we have need to be tested for excellence and stamina but this is not for everyone and we have to respect that. Even seasoned exhibitors never realize in their joy of the win, they won on that particular day because someone else didn't enter with his or her better blooms or the judge was evaluating the "best of the worst". Fifty years from now no one will even care who won at the "Fair Follies in Somewhere Town", but they will still want to grow dahlias and they will need someone to tell them how to do it.

Attracting and keeping people is an exercise in invention but keeping their interest is paramount. Make them welcome and feel they made the right decision to give up an evening with their family. Have a program at the meeting they can relate to. Have socials where members can get to know everyone. No one buys into anything with no return. Their job was to come to the meeting and our job was to give them something worthwhile to take home and keep them coming back. Get them involved. The look on their faces when those new dahlias bloom and they really like them makes it all worthwhile.

In The Nova Scotia Dahlia Society I felt it would be a novel way to talk about some forms of dahlia by having what I called, "The Great Dahlia Debate". It was to be done with humour and debate rules. The debaters were my friend, Arthur Haskins and myself. It was a David and Goliath fight, but David didn't win this one. The forms debated were the waterlily, (my favourite) and the cactus and semi cactus. The laughter generated was something the members needed but those three forms will be remembered, as will my bruises. Members must feel the camaraderie and have a good reason to join any group. We can go on and on about this but for my thoughts on this I will always enjoy the people who attend the meetings no matter how big or small the group is these folks have, over the years become my friends. It must be fun or why do it?

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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*******This is the last time this year I will put the dues notice in the newsletter. If you haven't paid your dues for this year you may want to do that soon so you can continue getting the information you will need to grow wonderful dahlias. *******

DAHLIA SOCIETY OF NOVA SCOTIA MEMBERSHIP FORM

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TOWN: _____

PHONE: _____

EMAIL: _____

Yes () No ()

(If you do not want your email used on the phone list please indicate and it will only be used for contacting you concerning club events.)

DUES ARE AS FOLLOWS: SINGLE: \$5.00 FAMILY: \$7.00

PLEASE MAIL DUES TO: ARTHUR HASKINS 8780 HIGHWAY 2 GREAT VILLAGE,
NOVA SCOTIA B0M 1L0

Beautiful Borders

How wonderful! Those out of favour are in favour again. For several years one could not find the mignon dahlia at the tuber sales. It seems they had fallen out of popularity. Now with more attention to beautifying throughout the landscape with dahlias, mignons have started to take the attention of many gardeners. Mignon single dahlias possess the same formation as the taller single dahlias except they have round ray floret tips. Horticulturists want to fill spaces, put dahlias in pots along with other plants, and mass plant one variety for that impact effect. This idea of using more mignons has gardeners frantically searching for the low growing varieties.

Last year our annual BBQ at the home of Joyce and Eric Higgins home was an educational adventure. I saw mignons planted throughout the gardens. To say these displays gave me the "I have to grow those" feeling would be an understatement. It will be like going back to the future with mignons. I don't really know why people stopped growing as many mignons but seeing the mass of colour these dahlias give is a wake up call. I know I wasn't the only person who thought that way.

These mignons have a bloom of up to 2 inches and pump out the blooms throughout the season. Some of the varieties that we are on the hunt for are Splinter (yellow), Inflammation (soft orange), Bonne Esperance (deep pink), and Rembrandt (deep red). Realizing a gardener needs to build up stock on these it would be necessary to make sure the storage is well thought out. In past years I didn't cut the small tubers in the fall as I do for other dahlias. The tubers seemed to do better if I waited until spring to separate them. They fared better in storage and didn't dry out.

The gallery series also comes to mind when thinking of low growing dahlias that can be used as borders with a prolific bloom count. Crossing border dahlias and low growing dahlias to achieve their low height factor and prolific bloom makes these varieties popular. The 4-inch decorative bloom form of these plants along with the mass of blooms as well as the 12 – 16 inch height factor is useful in the landscape. Some of the more known varieties of the gallery series are:

The present varieties of the Gallery Dahlia collection and their characteristics:				
Variety name	Class	Colour	Height	Ø Flower
Gallery Art Deco	dec	Orange, underside deep red brown	40 cm, 16"	12 cm, 4.8"
Gallery Art Fair	dec	White,yellow-green in the centre	30 cm, 12"	13 cm, 5.2"
Gallery Art Nouveau	dec	Lilac, underside red-purple	40 cm, 16"	12 cm, 4.8"
Gallery Bellini	dec	Lilac pink, cream centre	40 cm, 16"	14 cm, 5.6"
Gallery Cézanne	dec	Yellow	30 cm, 12"	12 cm, 4.8"
Gallery Cobra	dec	Bright orange	45 cm, 18"	13 cm, 5.2"
Gallery Degas	dec	Lilac purple	45 cm, 18"	10 cm, 4"
Gallery Leonardo	dec	Salmon	35 cm, 14"	12 cm, 4.8"
Gallery Matisse	dec	Orange	30 cm, 12"	13 cm, 5.2"
Gallery Monet	dec	Creamy-white with lilac top	30 cm, 12"	13 cm, 5.2"
Gallery Pablo	dec	Salmon-orange with yellow centre	35 cm, 14"	14 cm, 5.6"
Gallery Rembrandt	dec	Lilac pink with green-white tip	35 cm, 14"	10 cm, 4"
Gallery Renoir	dec	Bright mauve	30 cm, 12"	14 cm, 5.6"
Gallery Rivera	dec	Red	30 cm, 12"	12 cm, 4.8"
Gallery Rubens	dec	Bright pink	40 cm, 16"	9 cm, 3.6"
Gallery Salvador	dec	Creamy white, large deep red top	35 cm, 14"	15 cm, 6"
Gallery Serenade	dec	Lemon	55 cm- 22 "	12 cm - 4,8"
Gallery Singer	dec	Red	30 cm, 12"	9 cm, 3.6"
Gallery Sisley	dec	Lilac-purple, with som white in the centre	25 cm, 10 "	11 cm, 4,4 "
Gallery Vermeer	dec	Bronze-yellow	35 cm, 14"	9 cm, 3.6"
Gallery Vincent	dec	Orange	30 cm, 12"	13 cm, 5.2"