Happy 2020 to you all! It is fun to be in the mode of looking forward to the upcoming 2020 dahlia season with all those wonderful and colorful flowers while the ground is white.

**Join Our DSO Judging Team**
The DSO has the great good fortune of having an experienced and capable set of dahlia judges. We benefitted from the wise leadership of Glenn Ruth for many years. His key guidance was to make the judging process an enjoyable one where the objectives were not only to get the best blooms to the head table but also to learn about judging from our colleagues and about how to grow the best dahlias. As a result, we virtually always have a good time in the judging process.

The requirements to become a Candidate Judge are very simple. You need to be a member of the ADS and you need to get a Judging Manual. Then you are eligible to join judging teams at our shows. If you don’t meet either of the above requirements but want to give it a try, let me know at a show and you can listen in on a team’s deliberations or serve as a clerk for the team.

An important benefit of becoming a judge is that it is an excellent entre to participating in dahlia shows other than ours. The picture on the left shows part of the final judging at the Columbus show last fall. The requirements for becoming an Accredited or Senior Judge or for maintaining that judging position are more substantial. They include judging experience and passing written, but open-book, examinations. Those tests serve basically to improve your knowledge of the Judging Manual. (Several of you DSO judges need to complete the judging tests before the start of the season. Please let this note serve as a reminder that you should get those tests completed before the season starts! Now is the time to get that process behind you!)
Grow Seedlings!
One of the most effective ways to improve your judging skills is to grow seedlings. You will certainly enjoy seeing every one of those totally new flowers in your garden. That is the part I like the best! It is an inspiring privilege! It is also tempting to save tubers from every single one. My experience, however, says that the only practical strategy is to enjoy the heck out of 95% of those new cultivars for the season but then save only the “best” 5%.

Here comes the dilemma: which 5% should you keep? You will almost certainly find some seedlings with wonderful color that you feel that you just must keep. And you will likely have some with perfectly round and symmetrical form that you can’t possibly put in the compost. Well, my friends, the answer to the “which-ones-to-keep” question is found on the ADS seedling score sheet. If you will let the score sheet guide your choice of keepers, you are most likely to end up with the seedlings with the greatest probability of success on the show tables and with the cultivars that you will be able to name after your spouse or your kids or your best friends.

The essential first step in ranking your seedlings is to classify them. (That can be a tough step!) Start by reading the “ideal” form definitions found on page 3 of the 2020 Classification and Handbook of Dahlias (CHD). Keep in mind that the definitions describe the summit of each Form “mountain” and that almost all dahlias are at some “elevation” short of the summit. Your objective is to find which peak your new seedling falls closest to.

With the classification in hand, you can then walk through the judging criteria and develop a working score for each seedling. It is particularly useful to experience the discipline of rating each of the various characteristics among the seedlings. For example, I developed a clear standard for what it takes to get a score of 15 for Substance. I recommend using a spreadsheet so the comparisons across the attributes are most obvious. Pretend that the three seedlings pictured below are in your dahlia patch and you need to decide which two to keep!