Last month we started to talk about identifying Formal Decorative cultivars and the range of forms on that form “mountain.” Do you remember the mountain analogy? Consider the ideal definition in the CHD to describe the very top point on the mountain, with perhaps an occasional bloom setting on that summit, but the great majority of cultivars lying somewhere on the hillside or ridges below the ideal summit.

We were looking at three of Les and Vivian Connel’s new cultivars that were in the Tacoma Trial Garden, each of which scored as a Formal Decorative. We concluded that Tahoma Morn, on the left comes pretty close to that mountain top. T. Banker, center, does too, when you remember that the florets you examine to determine Form are at the equator of the bloom. Do the florets match the definition exactly? No, the ideal definition calls for flat, smooth ray florets and both T Morn and T. Banker have slightly involute florets.

One of your assignments was to determine the point value corresponding to Trueness to Form. Did you find the table on page 40 in the Guide to Judging Dahlias? It tells you that, for fully double dahlias, True Form counts for 5 of the 28 points that comprise Form.

I would say that T. Morn and T. Banker are within 1 point.

**Stellar:** Ray florets are long and narrow along their length with pointed tips preferred; like a star, they exhibit space between the ray florets in each of the rows and possess a uniform, regular arrangement. All the florets will have a partially involute form in an approximate “U” shape in cross-section for the majority of their length and will recurve toward the stem; the bloom depth should be greater than half the diameter and should not be greater than the diameter.
(80%) of that summit. T. Gold, on the right, is a little further down that mountain; right? I would say that it as down toward the “ridge” that heads over to “ST peak.” Why? Did you check the ST and FD definitions? The florets on Tahoma Gold are long and pointed (ST) but only very slightly involute and broad (FD). The key reason to choose FD, however, is the fact that ST calls for U shaped florets and those on T. Gold are only slightly involute. OK, what is the appropriate penalty for True Form for T. Gold, assuming (as usual!) that the single picture of the single bloom is thoroughly representative? Even though we have concluded that it best fits in the FD category, it is clear that it is not at the summit. On the other hand, the key discrepancy from ideal is the pointed floret. It probably deserves more than half of the points for that True Form criterion, or a penalty less than 2.5 points.

OK, let’s go across that ST ridge and look at another entry in the Tacoma Trial Garden. The bloom at the right is Paul Bloomquist’s Pumpkin. Clearly, it has the long, narrow, ray florets and the open and airy spacing between them that are called for in the ST definition. The ray florets are also U-shaped, but perhaps not as much as a cultivar setting at the summit of ST mountain. They are flattening out as they get out to the equator. Compare them to the florets on AC Rooster on the right. That bloom was the best Single Bloom entry for a Novice at the National Show. Do you see a characteristic of Rooster’s florets that is a little inconsistent with the ideal definition? They are slightly irregular in arrangement (but it is still a great bloom, particularly from a Novice!).

There is another very heavily populated “ridge” that connects to the FD mountain. I call it Barberry Ridge in recognition of Ball (Miniature Ball, Pompon): Blooms are ball shaped with uniform florets, involute for most of their length, and fully involute for more than half their length; the ray florets reflex to the stem. Ray floret tips in cross-section should be circular and exhibit little distortion, completely filling the floral head and are either round or blunt without notch or point.
the number of beautiful Barbarry introductions that run along it. It is, of course, the ridge between “mount FD” and “mount BA.” Stevan’s Teddy, right scored 85.8 as a BB FD RD in the Tacoma TG. The ray florets are more involute, but they are way short of fully involute. I would characterize this cultivar as one of those cultivars that are on the FD mountain, but down the mountain a bit towards Barbarry Ridge.

The cultivar pictured at the right is an undisseminated seedling from Wayne Lobaugh. He showed it at the National as a M FD. The florets may be a bit tough to see, but they are definitely involute. Out at the equator of the bloom, they flatten out enough that FD is a better call than MBa. OK, how much would you deduct for Trueness to Form on this beautiful bloom? Remember you are only working with 5 points—and the only discrepancy from the ideal definition for Formal Decorative may be the shape of those florets. It isn’t an easy call; the penalty should probably be of the order of 2.5 points. Does that help you to see why some of the ‘tweeners’ out there along Barbarry Ridge do so well in show competition?!

OK, let’s on across that ridge to Mount Ball. There were some wonderful balls in the Trial Gardens this year. Dick and Danielle Parshall’s Clearview Daniel, BA YL11, won the Derrill W. Hart Award, averaging 89.6 in its best three gardens. It is a real eye grabber. The picture at the right is of Dave and Leone Smith’s Clearview Daniel entry in the Open Class at the National Show. It won the best ball award there. It was virtually
perfect. Now, go back a page and read the Ball definition again. What do you think? I think we’re looking at a great example of the summit of that Ball mountain!

A C White Rabbit, right, is another 2013 ball (In this case MBa) with wonderful form. I would rank it maybe only one step off the peak; the florets are slightly flattened at the equator.

Dick Williams did almost as well with his Skipley Lois Jean, a beautiful lavender Ball. In many years, his 88.8 would have won the Hart Medal easily. It couldn’t get past Clearview Daniel in 2012! It scored in six Trial Gardens! That Ball summit definitely got a little more crowded in 2012!

Here’s another great entry in the Tacoma Trial Garden. Do you recognize it? It is Baron Keith. It scored 86.9 as an FD(!). It sure doesn’t look a whole lot like the other FDs we’ve been studying. What is the difference? The shape of the florets is a pretty good answer. They are, however, not only involute like some of the others were, but they are also a little “W-shaped” in cross-section. Look, for example, at the floret at about 4 o’clock with arrow on it. It has a “trough” along its length. OK, the question for the month is, if B Keith is FD mountain, what ridge is it on; what mountain connects to that ridge? What is the appropriate penalty for Trueness to Form for this bloom? Ron