The JUDGE’s Corner
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Are you thinking about your 2013 dahlia garden? That is certainly a fun part of growing dahlias, isn’t it! I want for all of you to save a small area for some seedlings in your 2013 garden. This year’s seedling contest will include classes for each of the previous years’ contests plus two additional classes for 2013 seedlings. (The contest is getting to be a pretty big show all by itself! :-)). The two groups of 2013 seedlings I have in mind are the beneficiaries of the Ilers who operate Blossom Gulch Dahlias in Coos Bay, OR, and our own Bill Takaes.

Some of you will recall the wonderful open-centered seedlings that Kathy Iler showed Barbara and me when we visited there last fall. She generously sent me a lot of seeds from her garden and we will be distributing them and/or plants grown from them to you this spring! Worth saving some space?! Our seminar at Petitti’s will focus on these NO cultivars. Please remember to check Blossom Gulch Dahlias on the internet as you order cultivars for this summer. They’ve been very generous to us!

Bill’s contribution will be for everybody, but particularly those purists out there who prefer not to have any open-centered cultivars to mess up their fully-double gene pool! (That really is why I have two well-separated garden areas—so as not to spoil my ability to gather fully-double Bill’s row of Baron Jeffs allowed me to gather lots of Baron Jeff seed pods before we headed south. I now have lots of seeds out of those Baron Jeffs. Here again, we will be distributing seeds and/or plants grown from those seeds. In this case, I think we will want to give prizes for the seedling that looks most like B Jeff。“
(few, no doubt), the one that looks least like B Jeff (more common), as well as the best seedling in the group.

I hope those sound like interesting projects! As usual, the value in them will be in the discussion we will have about the relative merits of the entries. Please plan to join in the fun! My objective here, of course, is to get you hooked on growing seedlings. Once there, it is an easy step for you to start showing and then judging! Hooray!

In my last column, I said I was going to need to review the status of all of our judges and confirm that you/they have met all the criteria to be at their level of accreditation. I did not do that. (Sorry!) It turns out that having partial files both in Chagrin Falls and Naples made it pretty much impossible to do this year. I’ll need to do that review this summer. Now would be a great time to work on your judge’s test—whether you’re a Senior Judge or a Candidate Judge. Let me know if you need help in finding or completing the tests.

Where would you find the current definition for a Novelty Open (NO) cultivar? The answer, of course, is in the 2013 Classification and Handbook of Dahlias. Every ADS member gets one with the December Bulletin. If you aren’t a member, you can still get one by joining soon. Check with John or Joann at the next meeting! The NO definition is the shortest one in the book. It is: *Dahlias with characteristics distinct and different from the present classifications are classified as novelty dahlias. The center should be open with disc center in proper proportion to the ray florets.* Frankly, I don’t find that definition to be real helpful. What, for example, would you do with an entry that had two short florets at the top and four long florets at the bottom? Maybe it would look a little like a violet, for example. What is the “proper” proportion for the ray florets? The answer to the former question would be discernible in a Trial Garden. Are the blooms all the same? (Please don’t pull out one of 2013 seedling plants if all the blooms are similarly asymmetrical but look like a violet!) You can tell already that we’re going to have an interesting discussion on October 5, 2013.
Here is a picture of Barbara checking out the Novelty Open class at the Puget Sound show last fall. There were a lot of entries; a number of them were Roland Verrone’s Morning Star. Cultivars like this one are being called “orchettes” inasmuch as they are basically an orchid with petaloids like a collarette. The ADS Classification Committee is considering making a new form based on these cultivars. It is becoming to be a pretty widespread type of NO. Note that it is symmetrical around the center of the bloom. All of the NO cultivars I’ve seen have exhibited that symmetry. It will be most interesting to see what happens when that first asymmetrical NO shows up! In the meantime, we should continue to judge form in the current, symmetrical NOs on the same basis we judge symmetry in the other open-centered cultivars.

What, then, is important? A good (symmetrical) NO bloom will have ray florets of equal length and uniform shape and they will be uniformly distributed around the disc florets. The gaps between the florets will be the same and the petaloids, in the “orchette” example, should be similar from one floret to the next. Look at the bloom on the top of the next page. How well do you think this picture of one of Kathy’s ‘orchette’ seedlings meet those criteria? From a big picture point of view, pretty well, I would say. However, take a closer look at the gap just past noon; it looks bigger than the others, doesn’t it. That floret just short of noon is also ‘unrolled’ more than most of the others. What other form faults do you see? (What are the other Form fault categories for an open-centered cultivar? A: Development and Trueness to form.) This bloom may be slightly past its peak; it
looks like there are more than three rows of pollen showing. I don’t think that you can fault this one with regard to adherence to the ideal definition. Bottom line? With Form at 28 points and pass/fail (85%) at --4.2 points, I would not deduct more than four points. It would pass Form as I see it.

I hope that for our Petitti’s show next fall we will get about ten more that look just like that one from Kathy’s seeds and seedlings we’ll distribute in March and April!

OK, back to some basics on judging! We often talk about dahlias being true to form. In fact, it is one of those criteria that can be way overemphasized. This week’s homework assignment: how many points should you consider for trueness to form in fully double dahlias? Open-centered dahlias? (The latter answer isn’t in any of our basic reference material.)

I have some good photos of new cultivars that were in the Pacific Northwest Trial Gardens last year. They will make a good basis for discussion. Tahoma Morn is one of several successful FDs that the Connells had in the Tacoma Trial Garden last year. It scored 87.1 as a BB FD WH.

How well does Tahoma Morn satisfy the definition of a Formal Dec? Recall the definition:

**Formal Decorative:** Ray florets are generally flat, broad, and smooth in a regular arrangement that gradually recurve toward the stem. Each ray floret should convey uniform and regular size arrangement with the tips preferably round or extending to a slight point. The ideal depth is three-quarters the diameter of the bloom and should not be greater than the diameter.
Would you agree that Takoma Morn does a good job of meeting all the criteria? It has ray florets that are flat and broad, recurving to the stem. They are arranged in a regular manner and have rounded tips. Ok, check the FD box for that one.

Now let’s look at Tahoma Gold that scored 87.9 as a M FD Y and Tahoma Banker that scored 86.9 as a M FD LV. Are you thinking “What the heck; FD!?!?” I don’t blame you; they look different, don’t they! Take another look at the FD definition.

How about Tahoma Banker? Don’t get caught up too much in the shape of those ray florets near the center. Form is determined by the ray florets at the equator. When you focus on those, you see relatively flat, broad florets that are rounded at the tip and recurve toward the stem. Ok, another FD.

Tahoma Gold is the one that may differ most from the definition. The ray florets are pretty much flat, broad and smooth—but it is tough to call those points “slight,” isn’t it. The question, then, is how to classify it as something other than FD. My immediate thought was ST; how about you? Homework assignment number two is to take a look at the ST definition in your CHD. Are the T Gold florets long, narrow, and “U”-shaped? Is there space between the florets? I think you will end up agreeing that FD is best for Tahoma Gold, too. Question three, then, is how severe is the form fault for those pointed ray florets?

Send me an email if you can’t wait for an answer next month.

:-) Ron