“This is the worst Trial Garden I’ve ever seen!” I told the judges gathered on September 16 and I’ve visited literally all of them. Of course, I was talking about my own back yard. Judging seedlings is a requirement to be an American Dahlia Society (ADS) judge. The ADS judging rules allow Accreditation Chairmen (I am one of them) to use a private garden as a substitute for a real Trial Garden (TG). That lets judges like those of us in the DSO participate in the judging of seedlings near home when a real Trial Garden is a substantial distance away. (There used to be one in Youngstown, but the closest now is in Indiana.) As ugly as my garden was, nonetheless I think it helped to serve as a refresher for Accredited (AC) and Senior (SR) judges on how to judge seedlings and to provide everyone with the opportunity to meet the seedling requirements to maintain their judging status. Perhaps most importantly, it gave our Candidate (CN) judges the opportunity to do some quantitative evaluation of a number of seedlings and other cultivars in a garden setting.

Recall that there are two ways that seedlings are evaluated for possible entry into the American Dahlia Society Classification Book: “on the bench” and in a Trial Garden. The Seedling Bench Evaluation (SBE) is done on three blooms staged in a container. The Trial Garden is done on the blooms in several plants in a garden.

I set up three containers of three different seedlings for SBE and had a series of five Trial Garden entries marked in the garden. (One of the seedlings was “on the bench” as well as in the garden.) In addition, for practice in simply classifying cultivars (i.e., identifying their size, form, and color), I marked 15 other cultivars in my garden.

Three teams of judges were formed headed by Jerry Moreno, Randy
Foith, and Dave Cap who led Candidate judges (Rob and Sharon Swaney, Jim Thompson and Sarah Luikart, Dan Kelly, and Bill Takaes) through the process of quantitatively evaluating several seedlings. Jim Chuey, Kathy Foith, and Barb Miner added to their judged-seedlings totals and provided scores to compare with the CN judging teams. After an hour or so of judging, as a group we then discussed our results and the questions that arose in the process. Following Glenn Ruth’s basic judging rules, we had a good time and we all learned something about the judging of seedlings!

By the way, here is the picture of the seedling that was both in the TG list and on the SBE list. Both sets of scores were very similar. Nice job, teams!

It is hard to imagine that we’re almost to the end of the show season, isn’t it! In some ways, we’ve saved the best for last! This is the fourth year we’ve been doing the Seedling Challenge and the associated judging seminars at the Petitti show. As a consequence, those of you who have been growing the open-centered seedlings for four years are now eligible to enter them on the ADS Seedling Bench! Remember that you need to enter three blooms in a container. They need to be as similar as possible. The entry will be scored and if it scores 85 points or more, it will become an “official” ADS dahlia and
you get to name it! You should also have a plan for introducing your new cultivar to the dahlia world. If you have questions about how to do that, be sure to ask me. Send me an email or we can discuss the process at the show.

The Boley stellar seedlings become eligible next year. If you have good ones, you should be thinking about putting those seedlings into various Trial Gardens next spring. Bring them to the Petitti show to see how they do among their ST cousins; that should help you decide about entering them. The second special seedling section at the Petitti show will be for single blooms of those 2010 Boley ST seedlings.

The third special seedling class at Petitti’s will be the anemone (AN) Seedling Challenge for 2012. I’ve seen a couple AN seedlings that others have grown from those seeds. (Hooray!) We will, however, also include any of those seedlings we distributed last spring; they don’t need to be AN. We’ll pick the best and the worst of each of the 2012 class during the seminar on Saturday afternoon.

The final class will be for any new seedlings you’d like to show. I can’t resist showing you one of John Learner’s that he brought to the DSO show at ParmaTown. Can you see the petaloids on each of the ray florets? Amazing! It looks either like a fully double collarette or a formal dec with contrasting petaloids on each ray floret. It was a remarkable and very interesting bloom! Bring some more on the 6th if you can, John!

The logistics for the judging seminar on Saturday, Oct 6 will be to judge the show as usual in the morning (hopefully including some ADS Seedling Bench Evaluations on those 2009 seedlings). Barbara will supply a very simple lunch for those interested in staying for the judging seminar in the afternoon. We will then work our way through the four classes of seedlings, picking the best of each in three classes and the worst of the new 2012 anemone and open-centered class. Remember that the worst entry needs to show the worst and lowest scoring combination of the judging attributes; i.e., form,
color, etc. A pair of leaves and a stem doesn’t count! :-)

Please do some homework on the Anemone form. The Guide to Judging Dahlias, the Classification and Handbook of Dahlias, and the outline of our 2012 DSO Judging Seminars (now available on the website) will be useful references.

Barbara and I had an opportunity to visit Blossom Gulch Dahlias a couple weeks ago. It was wonderful! Here are a couple of their Anemone seedlings. More about Blossom Gulch later.