Next Meeting:
Friday, April 19, 7 PM
Busch Community Room
7501 Ridge Road, Parma

Program:
Annual Tuber Auction

INSIDE: Meet a Member—Jim Thompson and Sarah Luikart; Ron Miner on judging laciniated dahlias and virus update; and a summary of March program by Nathan Rutz of Rust Belt Riders about composting and organic dahlia growing.
Hi Dahlia Lovers,

Spring is slowly but surely coming our way. Have you checked your tubers? Discard the ones that turned to mush. If they are shriveled or a little soft to the touch, try putting them in moist peat moss. They may recover well enough to eventually pot them. If you have extra tubers to donate, please bring them to Petitti’s Oakwood, April 13, 9-3, or to our auction meeting on April 19. Be sure they are clean and identified by name, size, form, and color. Also note if they came from a plant that was tested to be virus-free. Write on the tuber itself with an ink pencil or put tuber(s) in a baggie and mark the baggie. Thanks.

At the March meeting, as an affiliate of the Holden Forest & Gardens, DSO voted to participate in the GLOW Holiday Program held at the Cleveland Botanical Gardens 11/23/19-1/5/20 by decorating a wreath. This year’s theme is “Tiny Treasures.” So put on your creative thinking caps to suggest a sub-theme that in the spirit of “Tiny Treasures” would promote the dahlia. It was written in the theme definition that “gnomes, elves, angels, pollinators, insects, Alpine Gardens are all just springboard ideas that might be utilized or incorporated into an Affiliate Club’s theme.” Barbara Hosta is our Holden rep so when you think of a neat idea, send it her way at bjh074@gmail.com. She will collect them. I know that we have many creative members in DSO so get your imagination juices flowing to produce a wreath that shows the public how magical our favorite bloom is. Thanks.

Congratulations to Nancy Riopelle who won eight awards in the ADS Photo Contest of 2018. See her winning photographs at www.dahlia.org. Her first place entry of Misty Todd in the Dahlia Portraits category is absolutely stunning.

And thanks to the 25 or so members who attended the March meeting at which Nathan Rutz of Rust Belt Riders, a waste management service, gave an excellent presentation on encouraging us to join the fight against food waste by composting. Check out what they are doing at www.rustbeltriders.com. It is a very exciting company that deserves our support.

I know that our meeting is on Good Friday, but we were unable to change the date. Apologies. Hope to see you then.

Jerry
Tuber Auction: Time to Stock Up

- Bring your clean, extra tubers for the society to auction.
- With indelible marker write the name, size, form and color plus whether they have been tested free of virus on the tuber or on a plastic baggie. Use the abbreviation “VF.”
- Take stock of what your needs are and come prepared to bid your favorites up.
- Dave Cap and Mike Weber will serve as our auctioneers. Tubers will be laid out on long tables from AA to smallest.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Tuber Sale: Saturday, April 13, 9 - 3, Petitti’s Oakwood. Bring extra tubers to sell, buy tubers, help man the tables.

DSO Programs: Friday, May 17, Plant Auction; Friday, June 21, Nancy Riopelle on raising monarch butterflies; Summer picnic Saturday, Aug. 3, at the Moebius Nature Center, Aurora.

Public Dahlia Sales: May 17-19, Holden Arboretum, Friday Noon to 6, Saturday/Sunday 10-4; May 16-18, Rockefeller Greenhouse, 9-4. Need volunteers to man the tables at both locations.
that plants can absorb. Soil fungi play into this process beneficially because they send out a mass of filaments and digest food on the outside of their “bodies.” “We wouldn’t be here without this process,” Nathan said. In earlier times, we got coal through this process because the fungi didn’t exist then. Now they help produce our food. These mycorrhizal fungi can trade nutrients directly with plant roots thus giving the plant something it needs in exchange for sugar in a symbiotic relationship that also results in improved soil quality.

Fertilizing with phosphorus prevents this process, impacts the plant negatively and then attracts unhealthy organisms. A plant that absorbs too much urea can’t make protein. Insects can smell this situation and attack. “We want plants to be photosynthesizing at maximum capacity,” Nathan said. “Then they can give beneficial soil organisms lots of sugar and can get minerals back.” When the plant instead puts sugar in the soil, the fungi make glomalin, a damaging polysaccharide “glue” that sticks around for decades. Good soil needs to be crumbly, which is not promoted by tilling, compaction and chemicals. Tilling chops up fungi and kills all but the bacteria. Covering soil will reduce compaction. Chemicals are mostly salts, which damage plants. Nathan suggests using products less damaging such as fish hydrolysates, but not too much. Nathan called these “candy foods.” He said that fungal soils produce ammonium, which is easier for plants to use. Because the dahlias we grow originated in mountain savannas, Nathan suspects our dahlias prefer more fungal than bacterial soil. He advises adding things to our soil that feed the fungi such as composted leaves, aged wood chips and radial chips (three inches or smaller). Add compost in the fall, and let it sit. Finally, he suggested counting microorganisms rather than getting soil tests.
while visiting the Lakewood Dog Park with their four-legged friends. Sarah says, "Not only did the mutts hit it off, but so did we!"

Other than dahlias, Jim grows carnivorous plants in his South Lakewood garden with a collection numbering in the thousands, some of which he brought to his DSO meeting a few years ago so members could see these exotic plants and hear a friend of his speak about them. He enjoys being outdoors, bird watching, and occasionally relaxing with a craft beer. Sarah, on the other hand, enjoys listening to National Public Radio (NPR) and frequently reads children's literature. Her favorite authors include Maurice Sendak, Beatrix Potter, Tomie dePaola and Todd Parr. And she is passionate about animal welfare and environmental causes.

Born and raised in Lakewood, Jim opted to remain there after graduation and lived only a block away from Sarah's apartment. However, the couple did not meet until years later. After graduation from Lakewood High School, Jim continued to carve out his talent in woodworking. His specialized skill of designing, building and installing custom spiral and circular staircases led him in a rewarding career of more than 20 years. In 2018, Jim hung up his carpenter belt to follow his passion for plants and took a position with Casa Verde Growers, the commercial arm of Petitti Garden Centers.

Sarah grew up in Silver Lake, a small village in Summit County. After graduating from a local community college, Sarah entered the insurance industry. She currently works in downtown Cleveland at American International Group (AIG) in commercial property underwriting, but longs for the days when she can consider a career in nonprofit. She thanks both Sarah and Jim for sharing their time with the DSO for so many years. (And thanks to Sarah for her help in composing this article.)

Our March speaker, Nathan Rutz, shared the inspirational story of the innovative company he works for—Rust Belt Riders, along with a detailed account of making good compost to assist us in growing dahlias organically. Nathan has learned a lot about composting in the past several years that he is now applying as Director of Soil at Rust Belt Riders. Their process is to compost food scraps and branch chips in a 40:60 ratio with de-chlorinated water and turn the pile with a Bobcat loader frequently, which results in hot compost (130 to 180 degrees) that goes to potting soil in three months. The company has been able to make 50 cubic feet of soil in one month on their one acre of asphalt. He sought advanced training from a Vermont top soil company that produces methane, which contributes to global warming. He also learned about the concept of "regenerative agriculture," which captures carbon in the soil and above ground. The process involves a series of conversions starting with soil bacteria pulling minerals out of the soil and above ground. The process then gets eaten by protozoa, which then excrete a form of organic material that is added back to the soil. This process involves a series of conversions starting with soil bacteria pulling minerals out of the soil and above ground. The process then gets eaten by protozoa, which then excrete a form of organic material that is added back to the soil. This process is repeated until the soil becomes healthy and ready for planting.
by Ron Miner, baronminer@aol.com

Virus Update
We in the DSO, along with the members of our neighbor dahlia society, the Mahoning Valley DS, have the great good fortune to be at the forefront of the clean dahlia movement. That benefit is a direct result of the ongoing support by Jim Chuey through his Scheetz-Chuey Foundation. Thanks again, Jim!

As you may recall, one of the elements of last summer’s testing was free analyses of vendor’s plants. A key question that several of them had at the end of the process was along the lines of “Okay, now that I know that I have lots of stock with virus, where do I get clean stock?! Isn’t that a great question?! You and I have an excellent answer to that question—but the great majority of our dahlia-growing friends around the country do not!

With the cooperation of Jim, Tony, and several other DSO members, we have been able to supply Gx (tested free of virus for the last x years) tubers both at our local auctions and the Midwest auctions. Mike, Rob and their DSO volunteers have propagated those tubers into great plants for the auctions. (Thanks again, here, to Tom Demaline for the use of their greenhouse resources!)

We are going to try and share some of our local clean stock with the other Conferences for their auctions this spring. With the support of Professor Pappu and Jim, we also plan to provide each dahlia society with the opportunity to test plants at a subsidized rate. The plans will be finalized and presented in the June ADS Bulletin. The best news in the 2018 test results was that the combination of clean stock and rigorous disinfecting of tools produced a virus infection rate of just 17%.

Judging Laciniated Dahlias
The tips of the ray florets on laciniated dahlias are split. The ideal definition says that the “majority of ray florets will be uniformly arranged with a split, twist, or curl that conveys an overall fringed or frilled effect.” Further, if the florets have a shallow notch and have little twisting, it “should not be classified as laciniated.” Thus, in addition to the usual Form requirements (Symmetry, Contour, Development, Trueness to Form, and Depth), there are rather specific requirements for the shape of the ray florets in a laciniated dahlia. Those requirements are probably best treated as an important element of the Trueness to Form portion in the determination of the quality of the Form of the cultivar. It doesn’t fit in any of other categories. What is the value of “Trueness to Form?” Please check page 40 of the Guide to Judging Dahlias! This page deserves a sticky note.

Consider the 2017 Trial Garden seedlings on the left. What do you think of them? The dark red florets on the bloom at the top are dark enough that it is difficult to tell how deeply they are split. However, the color does make it pretty easy to see the gaps around the circumference of the bloom. Thus, even if the ray florets were to be deeply split and presented a fringed appearance, the Contour of the bloom would leave something to be desired.

The cross-sections of the pink and the white cultivars appear more uniform and round than the dark red one. What about the “split, twist, or curl that conveys an overall fringed or frilled effect” for those blooms? As usual, of course, we would want to be able to look at the backs and the sides of the blooms in order to make an informed decision. Nevertheless, I suggest that the pink bloom shows more twist and curl than the white bloom. Do you agree?

What about the light blend at the bottom? A fringed and frilled effect is readily evident, isn’t it?! At the same time, Contour on that one is not perfect, right? The gaps at 1 and 11 are pretty obvious.

Okay, how about the red bloom on the right here. I hope you agree that its Form comes closest to that ideal definition outlined above.