

Dahlias blossom in midsummer gardens

BY MARTY FIGLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

It's midsummer again and the dahlias are blooming profusely in many gardens. Members of the Southeastern Michigan Dahlia Society will have their 43rd annual show noon to 5 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 26, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 27.

The public is invited to see more than 1,000 blooms at Meadow Brook Village mall, 82 N. Adams, Rochester Hills. Admission is free. Qualified judges, members of the dahlia society, will determine the winners. Questions? Call Hank Lenhoff at (810) 788-9354.

One member who has won numerous awards is Hans Nielsen of Southfield. Nielsen has a landscape business for 23 years and now for the past 13 years has been "hooked on dahlias." His garden boasts 47 different varieties of these plants and he has developed several that he has named.

He used to grow roses but says,

"Growing dahlias is a relaxing hobby — I have more fun with dahlias — there are more varieties, and the beauty is fantastic."

Also, "There is more upkeep with roses, and I can use less chemicals with dahlias."

He said the dahlia was introduced in America in 1960 and right now there are more than 22,000 dahlia cultivars that have been patented, numbered and named.

He is the show chairman of the upcoming event in Rochester Hills. Nielsen explained that to show a bloom you must have a minimum of one set of leaves on the stem. Judges look for a perfect bloom, one with no holes, petals in the right places, no variation of color in the bloom petals unless the whole bloom has streaks. Each bloom has its own distinct color. The bloom must be leaning at a 45-degree angle from the stem. Clarity of color, a straight stem and a minimum of one set of leaves are

also necessary.

Steps to take

I asked Nielsen what a first-time dahlia grower should do. He outlined the steps:

1. Visit a grower (or show) and see the colors; decide what color and variety you want to grow.

2. Take name and number off the tag and save it for a spring sale.

3. Plant no more than 20 plants the first year.

4. In the spring, rototill the bed adding very rich manure that has been composted for one year and incorporate a 6-24-24 granular fertilizer.

5. Plant the tubers five inches deep, 36 inches apart.

6. Water well to settle the soil around the tubers.

7. Put a six-foot tall stake beside each plant. A 1/4-inch steel rod works best. Wood will only last two seasons at the most and the cost is virtually the same.

8. Around July 20, add a 6-24-24 granular fertilizer, cultivating it in by hand. The number 6 on the bag is for growth, the middle 24 number is for root development and the last 24 for the health of the plant. Water it in well.

9. Water regularly if necessary. His rule of thumb: "If the leaf hangs down, water — if it stands up, don't water."

10. As the plant grows tie it to the stake with binder twine (hemp twine).

11. As the buds show, disbud. "Disbudding is the most important aspect to get optimum bloom for a show flower." Remove the bud one set of leaves down the stem, two sets if necessary.

12. Know how long it takes the flower to open. "Pom-Pom" takes 20 to 23 days, "BB" blooms 23 to 25 days, "B" blooms about 26 days, and "A" and "AA," 28 to 34 days.

13. Enjoy the flowers.

14. After the third frost cut the top off to five inches, then leave the tuber in the ground for three to five days to set the eyes for the following year.

15. Start digging tubers, wash them, dry on a garage floor, overnight, upside down to get the water out of the hollow stem.

16. Trim off feeder roots.

17. Divide clump into two parts.

Make extra name tags for the second half of the clump.

18. Bury the tubers in vermiculite in Styrofoam boxes. Set them in an unheated garage — 38 degrees is perfect. Don't let them freeze.

19. The first of January check for any damaged tubers and discard them.

20. Put your order in for new varieties in January or February.

21. After you're hooked, join the dahlia society.

More tips

Skill and patience is necessary to hybridize a dahlia. It takes three years to prove the plant is perfect. The first year the seedling is judged, the second it must be the same plant and the third again the same, then it is named and numbered if it earns a score of 85 or better from the judges.

"When you have a perfect hybrid it makes your year."

He also said, "Slugs and snails are a dahlia grower's worst enemies together with earwigs." He uses Sevin 10 for the earwigs and has found K-Gro from Kmart the "most effective product for snails and slugs."

"I grow the flowers for myself and people who admire them."

Nielsen also has taught people who have subsequently joined the dahlia society. Among them are Harold Burston of Garden City, Dick and Priscilla Arrington of Farmington Hills and Betty Dryden of Novi. Another member, Jim Neubacher of West Bloomfield, is in great demand to speak to garden groups about this interesting flower.

In addition to his membership in the SEMDS, he is a member of the American Dahlia Society and the Michigan Dahlia Society. He introduced the idea that new members for the SEMDS receive three tubers for their \$5 membership fee. Membership in this group numbers close to 100. For more information, call Abe Ulmer in Detroit at (313) 345-8689.

A second dahlia show will be noon to 5 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 2, and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 3, at the Frenchtown Square Mall, 2121 N. Monroe Street in Monroe. This show is sponsored by the Michigan Dahlia Society.



MARTY FIGLEY

Dazzling dahlia: Hans Nielsen of Southfield poses with *Spartacus*, his dahlia named *Flower of the Year*.

Seminar focuses on using bulbs in the landscape

SPECIAL WRITER

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A most unusual opportunity to study hardy spring and fall bulbs with Charles Cresson, author, lecturer and teacher, is being offered for the first time in this area.

This seminar is the same course currently taking place once a year at Longwood Gardens, Philadelphia, as part of its prestigious certificate program of plant courses on "The Use of Bulbs in the Landscape."

Cresson will present his complete course condensed into this two-day session. It will include both the artistic and practical use of bulbs for all seasons of the year.

The Gardeners Guild is sponsoring this event at Tellya Greenhouse, 3301 John R Road, Troy. The class will take place 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday,

Thursday, Sept. 20-21. A textbook, lunches and snacks will be provided and are included in the \$98 registration fee. Certificates of attendance will be given at the end of the session. Master gardeners will be given six hours of education credit.

To register, send a check made payable to The Gardeners Guild to: The Gardeners Guild, 10514 Elgin, Huntington Woods 48070. Registration is limited to the first 40 people, so register now to avoid disappointment. For more information, call Lynda Raleigh at (810) 544-8967.

Cresson is a graduate of the University of Vermont in plant and soil science and has studied at the University of Bath, Wisley and Longwood Gardens. His garden, "Hedgeleigh Spring," was recently featured on TV's "The Victory Garden." He is currently working on his

private garden that was developed by four generations of his family.

Cresson has written "Charles Cresson on the American Flower Garden" (\$20, hard cover), in which he deals with the practical matters of gardening such as staking and pruning. He advises to know your property and the plants you want in the garden, and explains how to use them in pleasing innovative combinations.

"Ornamental Trees" are two of his other books. In the first, the topic is thoroughly covered from design, construction and care of the specialized plants grown. Included is information about trough gardens, walls, ledges and paths. Cresson emphasizes the importance of scale and visiting other gardens (as well as studying natural rock outcroppings). The second book covers

details the characteristics and needs of many alpine plants.

The second explains how to use trees in a garden design, deals with pests and diseases and outlines the steps to ensure the health of the trees. The encyclopedic section contains much information about many trees suitable for a variety of garden locations.

Each of these books is priced at \$9. All three of the books are published by Prentice Hall, in the Burpee American Gardening Series.

The Intent of The Gardeners Guild is to further the artistic science of gardening for the advanced gardener. It strives for gardening excellence to further stimulate new ideas and to promote knowledge and growth. Members live in local cities such as Clarkston, Bloomfield Hills, Birmingham, Troy, Huntington Woods, Holly and Lake Angelus.