

Many Men Have Penchant For Raising Dahlias

By BETTY FRANKL

"Dahlias are a man's flowers," says Mrs. Joseph Gies as she admires some of the gorgeous blooms raised by her husband in the garden behind their Redford Township home.

Of course you don't have to be a man to raise dahlias, but these dramatic, robust beauties do appeal to male gardeners and many of the members of the Southeastern Michigan Dahlia Society are men.

Joseph Gies, a member of this society, is looking forward to sharing the beauty of his dahlias on Sunday, Aug. 22 when his garden, along with five other Detroit area gardens, will be open to the public for a garden tour.

Gies began raising dahlias about 20 years ago and soon built up a sizable collection. Each year he imports new varieties from Holland. In the garden behind his home and in an adjacent side lot there are

beds planted with over 200 "hills" of dahlias of about 80 different varieties.

THERE ARE miniatures only a foot high and giants as tall as a man. Flowers range in size from a few inches across to those as large as a dinner plate. Some have a single row of petals surrounding a central disc, but most are full-rounded blooms with many petals. Depending on the type, the petals can be relatively flat or twisted, quilled, curled, frilled or fluted. Colors include both delicate pastel tints and deep, intense, vibrant hues. They

are also many bi-color combinations.

The leaves on the dahlias are segmented into three parts. They are a rich deep green that serves as a perfect foil for the colorful blooms.

Although dahlias can be raised from seed, they are generally grown from tuberous roots. The tubers must be stored indoors in winter because the plants which are natives of Mexico can't withstand our cold winter weather.

In March, Mrs. Gies gives her husband a helping hand and starts the tubers in flats filled with vermiculite. Each

is carefully labeled. The flats are watered and kept on their relatively cool sun porch until they sprout. When the sprouts are a few inches tall, Mrs. Gies cuts the tubers apart, leaving a sprout on each piece. Each segment is then planted in a pot and grown on the sun porch until shortly after Memorial Day, the end of May, when they are planted in the garden.

At the time Gies plants the tubers in the garden he sets a small stake next to each plant. Later, as the plants grow tall, this is replaced by a taller sturdier stake. This way, the roots are not damaged by having a stake driven into them, but the garden is not cluttered with tall stakes before they are needed. Staking is necessary, especially for the tall dahlias, to keep the plants upright with straight branches.

The dahlias need to be watered during dry spells. Also, they are heavy "feeders" and need to be fertilized frequently. Gies feeds them every three weeks with a dry commercial fertilizer with a 5-20-20 formula which is low in nitrogen but high in potassium and phosphorus. He tosses a handful onto the soil around each plant and then waters it in.

In order to insure perfect exhibition caliber blooms free from insect damage, Gies uses a systemic poison that he applies to the plants with a hose sprayer every two weeks. He also mixes soluble plant food into the spray mixture so the plants get an additional feeding at the same time the insecticide is applied. Gies realizes that the insecticide is dangerous for humans and uses great care when spraying his plants and washes thoroughly after even touching the jar containing the insecticide.

AS THE DAHLIA plants grow, buds form in the axil of each leaf where it joins the stem. On the large-flowered kinds, to get long stems and larger blooms, the side buds are nipped off as they form, leaving only one on the end. This "disbudding" is not diffi-

cult but must be done all summer as the plants grow and new buds form. Small flowered kinds are not disbudded.

The Gieses get their first dahlia blooms by the end of June on a plant with purple and white flowers. More plants have come into bloom by now. But the peak of bloom is reached in early September.

The dahlias have a final burst of glory just before frost comes to end the season. The

plants are tender and frost blackens the leaves and kills the top growth.

After the first killing frost, Gies digs up the tubers, dries them in the air for a short while (less than an hour), cuts off the tops and then wraps the tubers in newspaper, carefully labeling each kind. The wrapped tubers are put in baskets and boxes and stored in the fruit cellar where the temperature is between 40 and 50 degrees all winter.

Gies' dahlias are attractively displayed. A row of spruce trees has been planted behind the dahlia beds. These tall evergreens make an attractive background for the bright dahlia flowers. The new varieties are grown in beds behind the house, where they can be viewed from the livingroom and diningroom windows. The older varieties are grown in a large bed in the side yard.

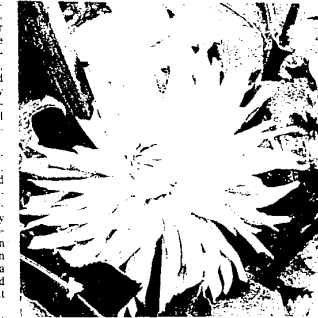
Mrs. Gies explains that the older varieties often have more durable blooms, but the newer kinds have longer stems and better color.

Dahlias make good cut flowers for indoor bouquets. Even a single large bloom makes an attractive display. They have a dramatic form that seems particularly appropriate in modern, contemporary settings. The cut blooms can last a week or more. They should be cut in early morning or evening. Blooms will last longer if the ends of the stems are dipped in boiling water or charred in a flame for a few seconds or if a small bit of stem is snipped off under water.

Among the beautiful varieties that will be on display in the Gies garden are "Explosion," a huge apple-nosed flower that combines bright yellow and flame orange; "Mary Elizabeth," an older variety of a soft red color that has won many awards; "Johnny Casey," with small red and white flowers like peppermint candies; "Lala Patti," a spectacular creamy white with blooms as large as a head of cabbage; "Doris Dada," a three-foot tall plant with ball-type flowers of salmon pink touched with gold; and "New Fun," a charming plant that grows over a foot high with four-inch apricot tinted flowers-shaped like water lilies.



JOSEPH GIES demonstrates how he "disbuds" his dahlias to produce exhibition blooms with larger flowers and longer stems. Sturdy stakes are needed to support the plants, each of which is carefully labeled.



THIS DAHLIA FLOWER, as large as a dinner plate, is known as a cactus-type. The petals are rolled into coils or spines which give the flower a crisp, firm texture.

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- P. G. Hydrangea Showy white flowers blending into pink and bronze shades in autumn 2-3 ft.
- Cotoneaster Divaricata Small pink flowers in Spring, bright red berries in Fall 2-3 ft.
- Persian Lilac Purple flowers in early Spring 2-3 ft.

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- Dwarf Korean Lilac Lovely fragrant lavender blue blooms in early Spring 10-12 in.
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