



DAHLIA SOCIETY OF GEORGIA NEWSLETTER

BO-BAY B-SC- LB Y/L

Volume 6, Issue 6

June, 2008

FLOWER OF THE YR

WWW.DAHLIASOCIETYOFGEORGIA.ORG

2008 PICNIC IN SMYRNA

Our annual picnic is always a wonderful time together and the highlight of the summer season. This year's picnic will be that and more as it will be at the home of Alyce Waldrop and Paul Dolan in Smyrna. They have a wonderful display of many different plants and landscapes which you can see a few shots of on our web site under the member gardens page. There is more as I have heard that Paul has been doing a lot of the heavy work since he is now retired so be ready to enjoy their en-

tire garden and home including their dahlias. Alyce enjoys growing Kidd's Climax A-FD-LB PK/Y which is a wonderful dahlia. This one flower and its beauty did so well for Alyce a few seasons ago that she wanted to learn more about growing dahlias and decided to join the DS of GA. We are so glad she did.



2007 PICNIC AT THE HOME OF BRIAN & LINDA KILLINGSWORTH IN ELLIJAY, GA

The Society will provide the meat and drinks and we ask each member family to bring a veggie, salad or dessert to share. Folks, the food is always great as we have some wonderful cooks in our Society.

Directions and a map will be included with the July newsletter.

Mark your calendars for July 26 and come to this year's picnic.



KIDD'S CLIMAX A-FD-LB

2008 CALENDAR

JUNE-SEPTEMBER

JUNE

JUNE 16- MEETING ABG

JULY

ANNUAL PICNIC

JULY 26

HOME OF ALYCE

WALDROP & PAUL DOLAN

SMYRNA, GA

AUGUST

AUGUST 18—MEETING ABG

SEPTEMBER

TENNESSEE DAHLIA SHOW

SEPTEMBER 6 & 7

CHATTANOOGA, TN

CAROLINAS DAHLIA SHOW,

SEPT 13-14

ASHEVILLE, NC

NAT'L DAHLIA SHOW

SEPT 18-22

LONGWOOD GARDENS

PHILADELPHIA, PA

GEORGIA DAHLIA SHOW

SEPT 27-28,

ATLANTA, GA

JUNE MEETING

JUNE 16, 7:30 PM

PROGRAM: SUMMER CARE FOR YOUR DAHLIAS

ATLANTA BOTANICAL GARDEN

COME EARLY FOR FREE "GROWER EXCESS" TUBERS AND PLANTS

JUNE- GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

This time last year, we were already into the initial days of the then unknown 2007 drought. Over the following days, weeks and months we were to experience a record breaking drought that threatened more than our dahlia gardens. Lake Lanier is yet to recover; watering bans are still a reality; Pike's Nursery as we knew it is no more as are many former landscape businesses. That's history (we hope) and 2008 is a new growing season.

Previously I'd recommended that you pot up your tubers so, when planting time arrived, they would have begun making a root system. Another advantage of beginning dahlia tubers in pots is when the daytime temperatures reach into the high 80s or low 90s, as we're now experiencing, the tubers are a source of water and food thus delaying the effects of heat and possible drought. Eventually they too will suffer if the high temperatures or drought goes on too long.

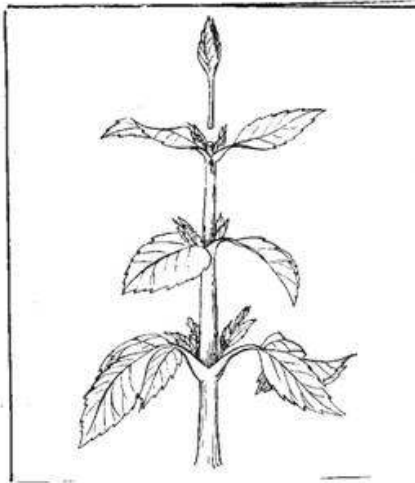
Unfortunately, conditions like bone dry gardens and sunny days with highs near 90 degrees quickly stress plants. The dahlias appear wilted because they are; some show burned leaves; and some quickly give in to any pathogen lying in wait in the soil as well as spider mites. Drought conditions call for the gardener to be ever on the lookout for disaster and with watering restrictions in effect, you need to follow the rules but water when ever possible. Water deeply those that show signs of wilt. You need to speed up the application of mulch to help the soil maintain moisture and cool the surrounding soil.

Early morning watering is better than midday and, both are better than late evening because of the threat of mildew, which is encouraged by late watering, followed by the dark of night.

Having backup plants is a good insurance policy because we will all lose some dahlias and gaps in the garden are not as pleasing as uniform planting. Besides, lost plants mean lost flowers.

Develop good cultivation habits

You should have placed a stake or other support devise in the ground before planting your dahlia tubers or plants. Whether you



planted dahlia tubers or plants, you have probably noticed how quickly dahlias grow. In a normal summer, you can usually **count on a dahlia plant to gain a pair of leaves a week**. This rate of growth requires us to constantly monitor each plant to be sure that we are **tying the plants** to the stake about every 12" to 18". Baling twine or pipe cleaners (found in the craft section of stores) or covered twist ties should do the trick. Do not tie too tightly because the dahlias will also grow in width during the summer and too tight binding can damage the stalks. After about 2 months of growing, dahlia stalks can be 1"- 2" in diameter. And remember that the average dahlia plant is about 4' tall and many can get to 6' or

NEW MEMBERS

THE DAHLIA SOCIETY OF GEORGIA IS
VERY PLEASED TO WELCOME THE
FOLLOWING NEW MEMBERS.

CHERI & DAVE FELTON
ATLANTA, GEORGIA

DIANNE & MICHAEL GAY
LILBURN, GEORGIA

THANK YOU FOR JOINING THE DAHLIA SOCIETY OF GEORGIA AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU AT OUR MONTHLY MEETINGS AND OTHER FUNCTIONS.

more. That's a lot of growth for about 4 ½ months. You will find that you need to **keep tying** the plant throughout the growing season. Those of you who chose to use tomato cages or other trellis-like material need to continue capturing and containing the plant growth within these enclosures.

Dahlias, if left to their own devices, would grow straight up without side branches and would produce one terminal bloom. We don't want that to happen. Instead, we want to develop bushier, well balanced plants to ensure we have a multitude of blooms throughout the blooming season (which for dahlias can be mid August until frost). To get these multiple blooms we must **pinch out the growing tip** of each plant. This step is referred to as **stopping**. Dahlias produce a rather thick stalk with a pair of offsetting (one on either side) leaves. The next week there will be another pair of leaves, and so on. If you pinch out the very top of the plant then you will soon see a "baby" branch begin to appear where the leave projects from the stalk. For example, if you pinch out the top of a dahlia plant that has 3 pairs of leaves, then in a few days you will see the plant beginning to produce 6 branches.

Dahlias usually produce 3 buds at the end of each branch. By stopping the plant in the above example, we can expect to produce 18 dahlia blooms (6 branches X 3 buds @ branch). Granted this is an example and you might get a few more or a few less, but these rules allow us to produce a much bushier plant and a very prolific bloomer. A **simple rule to follow** is to pinch out the top when the plant reaches 12" in height. **

You are probably noticing that weeds grow about as fast as dahlias. You will want to take time and eliminate as many weeds as possible then **mulch** with about 4" of some organic material like wheat straw. The mulch will not only help keep the weeds down but will help to maintain the moisture level in the soil while lowering the temperature of the soil. Some growers place several layers of dampened newspaper around their plants before applying the mulch. It makes an excellent weed barrier.

As the mulch deteriorates during the season, it will help enrich the soil for future crops. Do not place the mulch right up against the stalk of the plant because that can lead to rot and mildew problems as well as to serve as a haven for damaging insects. You should also continually **remove the bottom pairs of leaves** as the plant grows. Keep doing this throughout the summer. This action will allow more air to circulate under the plants and help ward off various mildew problems.

Feed and water the plants

Dahlias are heavy feeders and heavy drinkers. A side dressing of a well balanced fertilizer (something like 10-10-10 or 12-12-12), preferably a time release feeder, is much appreciated by your plants. Until mid to late August, dahlias do well with such formulas. We will discuss other fertilizers later. Dahlias like about 1 "of water a week, either from rain or a hose. Watering the ground above the roots is better than overhead watering. Soaker hoses are great for this and less labor intense. If, however, you find your plants wilting at mid day, a short blast of water will be a refreshing relief.

Inspect your plants for bugs and damage

Initially your garden and plants may look pristine and healthy. Make it a habit to closely inspect your plants, particularly the newest growth. **Aphids** (right) love to suck the juices from new growth. There is a symbiotic relationship between ants and aphids. **Ants** herd aphids in order to reap the "honeydew" produced by aphids,



so keep an eye out for any more than single ants. General insecticides will rid your plants of both.

Slugs can be found anywhere in your garden- on the soil, in pots, on you plants, etc. You will never wipe out all slugs, but by keeping you garden clean and free of debris will eliminate many places



Slugs love lettuce and other tender greens.

where they hide. Beer traps are known to entice and drown slugs. **Ground beetles** dine on slugs so be kind to them. Commercial slug bait is available but can be dangerous to pets.



Telltale yellowing and webs are easier to see.

Small webs covering coppery colored, lower leaves that curl, dry up and turn yellow are often times a sign of **spider mite** (right) damage; particularly in hot and dry weather. A suspected leaf can be shaken over a piece of white paper. Small dark, pepper grain sized spots falling onto the paper are probably spider mites. Treatment is complex and best addressed in a detailed discussion. A hard blast of cold water on the underside of leaves will remove many **spider mites**.



Early in the season small holes in dahlia plant leaves are a sure sign that **flea beetles** (below) have arrived. These BB (as in BB gun) sized black varmints can be controlled with Sevin but remember that is a contact killer and

will need to be applied often. Their damage is usually minor and they will disappear by early July. However, Sevin kills all insects, including good ones. Check the tops of your plants in early morning or late evening. You'll find them gathered, as if having coffee. I just squish the whole group with my fingers.

Not all bugs are bad. Notably, **ladybugs** (left) are very



beneficial because they dine on aphids and other undesirables. This year I'm seeing more of these good bugs than years past. They are not to be confused with another bad bug which is quite similar in appearance, the **spotted cucumber beetle** . Another

beneficial insect is the **parasitic wasp**, seen here next to a snack, an aphid. Note that the wasp is the same size as the aphid. Both ladybugs and parasitic wasps are offered by several nurseries as beneficial insects to introduce into you garden. It would definitely count as a Green Gardening effort for any grower



wanting to be as organic as possible.

Take care of yourself

I can not over emphasize the importance of protecting yourself from the sun. Before going out in the garden, even on cloudy days, cover any exposed skin using a sun screen of at least 30 SPF. Be sure to protect your ears where the skin is very thin. Even though we are having mainly mild temperatures so far, the sun is high and the danger is very real. It will be so until late September. Wear a good, broad brim hat and long

sleeves if possible. I work almost every day in the garden and



am there often in the middle of the day. Several years back I came up with, for lack of a better term, a "rolling umbrella, tool, towel, and water carrier". This contraption gives me shade while working on individual plants as well as saving me trips to find tools or other needed devises. "Made" from an umbrella lashed to a hand truck, you can move it around to position the umbrella between you and the sun and believe me, there is about a 10 to 20 degree temperature difference between sun and shade. A concrete block on the bottom tray keeps it from getting top heavy. Drink plenty of liquids and begin drinking them **BEFORE** you become thirsty.

**** NOTE: Exhibitors of dahlias will expend a lot of effort trying to time the arrival of the dahlia's first bloom to coincide with the dates of dahlia shows. They will also limit the amount of branches and buds that form thereby producing larger blooms. But that's another subject all together and this article is a "how to" for gardeners who want to cut plenty of beautiful dahlia blooms for their home and to share with friends and neighbors. BK**



KENORA LISA B-FD-PK (CORAL PINK)

THIS FLOWER GROWS VERY WELL IN THE SOUTH



LADY DARLENE B-FD-DB R/Y

THIS FLOWER GROWS VERY WELL IN THE SOUTH



SEEDLING B-LC-FL



BLOOMQUEST DAWN BB-SC-DB DP/Y