



NEXT MEETING: March 10 @ 7:30 @ 9th and Lincoln

Program: Group discussion with cameo specialties on Greenhouse building, gopher cages, soil conditioning. More amazing dahlias will be on sale! If you have tubers to share or cuttings or plants, do bring them. Make sure they have names on them, even if only "mystery." Who will bring nibbles to share?

VERMICOMOSTING

Alene Weber shared her knowledge of vermicomposting, gained over years of working in and teaching about gardens. Using worms to make very rich compost is all about soil biology, according to Alene. She made frequent references to the Soil Food Web and to Elaine Ingham, who developed this concept. (We have learned something of this from prior presenters, and much can be found on the internet.) For millennia, nature has been building up and breaking down organic matter to promote life; worms play a role in this grand design by eating decaying matter and enriching the soil with the end product of their digestion, making it available to other soil inhabitants to use. Their G-I tracts act like gizzards, breaking down organic matter and mixing it with other nutrients which appear in their castings (or "poop" to be scientific.) In vermicomposting, we are using these worm castings along with decaying food to form a kind of wonder product: organic fertilizer, soil amendment, and disease fighter. The bacteria and fungi in this mixture form glomulin, a soil aggregator which holds and stores nutrients, resists erosion and decomposes toxins.



Alene described set-ups for starting our own worm poop manufacturing plant. She prefers nesting plastic trays which can be found on-line. The bottom tray has a solid bottom and, optimally, a drainage spigot to release excess fluid. Trays above this have multi-perforated bottoms to allow worms to move about vertically, and to allow some compost and liquid to collect below. For less cost but more work, one could make some with 3 or 4 Rubber-Maid type tubs with holes drilled in the bottoms of the upper tray (s). To start, one needs to provide a congenial ambience for the worms, mimicking a forest floor. Some use coconut coir, but Alene likes cardboard and non-shiny paper cut small. Magazine type paper is coated with clay, she advises, not suitable for worms. Then moisten this mix to about 60% moisture, so some spouts out when squeezed. Add some food: kitchen vegetable or garden scraps. Worms and

Alene love watermelon, so this is often found in her bins. Store the set-up in a temperate location so the worms don't get cooked.

NOW the worms can be added. She recommends buying 1 to 2 pounds of red wiggly worms, either locally or on-line. Her favorite source is Sonoma Valley Worm Farm. These are added to the bottom tray. Keep feeding and adding some bedding. As the pile heightens, start putting this in the next tray up. These worms are vertical travelers in the soil, so will easily ascend when there is food in the upper trays.



The compost can be harvested from the bottom tray. It can be added directly to garden soil, but be sure to sprinkle water on it to keep the microbes alive. You can mix worm compost 1:4 with potting soil for cuttings, seedlings, or rooting. It can be mixed with water as an organic fertilizer. An extract of worm tea can help keep mildew off of foliage. (Wouldn't that be great!)

AND THE WINNERS ARE.....

Devorah executed the membership raffle drawing. The big \$25 dahlia certificate goes to John Dale. The \$20 was nabbed by Larry and Pam, and the \$15 will help Sue festoon the hillside in Golden Gate Park. Baker Bill donated several vases which were then raffled off to much acclaim. Too much fun! Great idea, Devi!

GENEROSITY OF FRIENDS

Wow! Did you see the luscious cuttings Devorah brought in for sale? They included BIG ones like Pennhill Dark Monarch and incurved Christie Dancer, and fairly new Carmela. Thanks to Gino for all the doughnuts and to Bill for his oh-so-moist carrot cake with decadent frosting. Ron and Joann responded to the holiday with heart-shaped cookies and a box full of Meyer lemons. John and Annette donated petite palmiers. Again on behalf of everyone who attends our DSC meetings, a tidy acknowledgement to Baker Bill for setting up our kitchen and cleaning it up afterwards. Please offer to help him next meeting.

IN MEMORIAM: ELSIE MUELLER

Past president, past treasurer, senior judge and long-time show manager died last November. Her son, Fred, reported her news by bringing all kinds of memorabilia to our meeting so that her love of dahlias could be passed on with her mementos. Elsie and her husband, Carl, began competing at dahlia shows back in 1950, often being seen wheeling both dahlia carts and baby strollers; Carl grew specimen blooms and Elsie designed arrangements. Both were instrumental in getting the Fair Building funded and built. Besides dahlias, Elsie was active in the Fuchsia Society, the orchid society and the California Horticultural Society.



TUBERSALE PROTOCOL

Speaking of Elsie, our annual Tuber and Plant sale is upon us. For many years Elsie made sure we had everything ready before the doors opened to the dahlia desirous masses. Please remember, our plant/tuber sale is our ONLY fund-raising event of the year. We try to earn enough money to pay our meeting room rent, the rent for our show in August, our website, our ribbons and cash prizes, as well as sundries like coffee/tea, cups, plates and things for our hospitality. Please get on

the volunteer list to help us before the sale. Sign up at the March and April meetings or call Deborah 415 816 2118. We need to sort tubers, label things, organize items by size and names; match names to photos and generally spruce things up. Please send out emails to all your friends about our sale. [Post our Tuber sale/Plant Sale flyer](#) on Facebook or just add it to your mass email mailing. Click here to download. If you are on Facebook, send out an announcement about our sale and ask all your fb friends to repost to all their friends. We learned last year, that most of our buyers had been informed by a friend or via email. Given the drought, we expect that people might grow fewer dahlias, so we need MORE buyers to grow at least a few dahlias.



FEED THE NEED

Upcoming tuber and plant sales around the Bay -

Monterey, April 4 Deer Park Shopping Mall, Rio Del Mar
San Francisco, April 9th & Lincoln, auditorium
San Leandro, April 25 14th and Estudillo

But what to buy you say?
Look no further than this
collection of beauties.



Parkland Rave



Fuzzy Wuzzy



Dark Sider



NTAC Patricia



Gladiator



AC Abbey



HH Black Beauty



AC Ianola



Vista Cody

MOVING INTO MARCH

How many of us already have dahlias sprouting out of the ground??? Amazing weather. By the first of March, I already had 5 in the dell up. The Wardens have several leafing out. First Priority: slug/snail/earwig bait. Corey's kills them all but can also make children and pets pretty sick if they ingest it. The GREEN solution is Sluggo Plus; it's a bit pricey, but does not endanger pets or kids. If you have had big 5-gallon pots over the tops of last year's dahlias, keep checking to ascertain whether sprouts have emerged. If so, remove the pot and immediately apply snail bait. Last chance to add chicken manure, which tends to be a bit "hot."

Consider adding a drip system. It's a lot easier to lay one out BEFORE you fill up the space with delicate young dahlias. Urban Farmer has not only all the equipment you need, but also plenty of drip experts to help you decide on best strategies. WEED! Every weed you pull today saves hours of back-breaking work later. If you buy cuttings at the Home Show or our March meeting, you might consider transplanting from the 4"x4" pot to a gallon or even 3 gallon pot if your garden is not ready for planting. I often transplant the cuttings I buy and let them spend some sheltered time under my front deck spinnaker developing more roots before I plant them in the ground.

The more extensive system of roots, the more likely it will survive. Are you growing cuttings or milk carton tubers? Now is the time to begin hardening them off. This means taking them outside during the daytime and bringing them back in a night; then gradually letting them stay outside in a protected spot overnight. Thus they become "hardened" and will survive the shock of transplanting into their permanent garden position. It is not too late to dig up dahlia clumps and divide them. If they have begun sprouting, it makes it even easier to determine where to cut. You can dig out a clump; slice off a healthy tuber with a nice shoot; immediately replant the bruiser; and process the other tubers to bring to our tuber sale. If you inadvertently have misplaced the name of certain cultivars, we will sell "mystery" dahlias again this spring. If you know the color, size or form, it's nice to write those on the mystery tuber.



Tony and I talked about columnar composting. Dig a hole up to 3' deep. Begin filling with household potato peels, egg shells, shrimp tails, coffee grounds etc. Put a heavy object over the top of the hole to prevent critters from slurping at your luscious buffet. When you have filled this compost column to within 2" of the surface, fill the remainder with dirt and keep covered with your heavy object for another couple weeks. This is an easy way to enrich your soil one small spot at a time. You will be amazed at how fast this compost breaks down into luxurious palatial plant environments.

Yours in Dirt,

Deborah

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Page layout: Mike Willmarth

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Originally Organized
In 1917
In San Francisco

the Dahlia was adopted as the
Official Flower of San Francisco
on October 4, 1926
by its Board of Supervisors