



**NEXT MEETING:** 12 November at 7 PM at 9<sup>th</sup> and Lincoln.  
**Program:** Lou reprises his excellent tutorial on how to dig, divide, process and store tubers for the winter. Everyone needs to review this. If you have a tuber clump that you don't care much about, bring it to try some hands-on practice dividing. Who will bring autumnal treats to share with hungry dahlia growers?

## WEB OF LIFE

Shilpa Thanawala and Paul Matulucca from the Master Gardeners of San Mateo and San Francisco explained why maintaining the Web of Life enhances everything in one's garden. Shilpa's mantra, "Feed your soil, not your plant" exhorted us to maintain a complete ecosystem from the big plants down to the micro-organisms. Dirt has 3 main sizes from largest to smallest: soil, silt and clay. Because clay particles are so small, they compact very densely. Introducing the "secret ingredient" organic matter, lets these tinzy clay bits aggregate with other looser items. The looser and better drained the soil, the better the micro community thrives. The happier your worms, nematodes and mychrorrhizae, the lushier your soil. Maintaining this flourishing microscopic society means eliminating rototilling. Moreover, Shilpa suggested, "Cover your soil. Naked soil degrades rapidly." To keep weeds under control, put flat cardboards covered with leaves and



compost across your patch. Paul explained a chart that showed at what PH certain trace elements become available to plants.



Dahlias prefer the 6.8-6.9 range. Paul handed out Peaceful Valley cover crop grids with variety on one axis and aspects on the other. For example: Buckwheat provides good weed competition, adds significant organic matter, attracts beneficial insects, grows 13"-36" high, is somewhat drought tolerant, loosens heavy soil, and is

easily established.

Peggy named several places in the North Bay including Grab 'n Grow in Sonoma for all different types of manure/compost/soil. Diana said her son, Shane, delivers throughout the Bay area: BarlowHauling.com Devorah commends her Bokahsi Japanese anaerobic composting system that produces divine lychee worm casting syrup. She has it in her kitchen where it DOES NOT smell. Lola recommended VF 11, a liquid foliar feed. Phil dumps 30+ bags of commercial chicken manure on his fallow patch.

## GENEROSITY OF FRIENDS

How very kind of Ron to drive in from Marin with another box of his succulent Meyers Lemons to share. Maggie baked us her chocolate chip cookies. Lola brought healthy nuts. Gino donated sugar cookies. Elizabeth and her daughter brought Halloween cookies. And Pat spoiled us all with lemonade, grapes, edamame, and chocolate covered little fruits. Soooo yummy. Thank you all for supporting your fellow DCSers.

## SUMPTUOUS SONOMA

Chad and Tom lavished dahlias on a snazzy outdoor party in Sonoma. With dahlia shows foreby, Chad designed both large (3' or higher) arrangements for the head table and then lined the long banquets with small conversational bouquets. So not only was it a beautiful event, but Tom said that several North Country land owners vowed to grow dahlias for the first time next year. Hope they come to our Tuber Sale in April.



## DAHLIA RELIQUERIES, LANTERNS, PAINTINGS - OH MY



Our beloved artist, Kevin Woodson, has finally returned to the Bay area and plunged himself into dahlia art. When he learned that Deborah's

cousins flew in for 2 reasons—to tour the Dell and to meet him—he braved nutzoo SF traffic and record-setting heat to show them an unfinished opus. He featured dahlias in the intricate lanterns he's exhibiting at Lake Merritt Autumn Lights Festival.



## BIRTHDAY PRESENT



What do you get for the woman who has everything? John P brought Deborah a new volunteer for the Dahlia Dell, Peter. Peter used to garden  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre on the coast and longed to surround himself in the growing process again. After two weeks of plucking mildewed and brown leaves, he's matriculated to deadheading and disbudding.

Moreover, John sold several of his dahlia plants after our sale and donated \$100 to DSC. Drop by on a Saturday morning to meet our newest Dellian and to thank John for his continued creative support.

## HILLSIDE GIRLS REUNITED

How long has it been since Barbara Swanson curated the Eastern side of The Hillside at the park? We won't count; we'll just be delighted that she dropped by to share memories with Deb and Tinsky. Barbara says that growing dahlias in SoCal is much harder because of the heat, sun, and soil issues.



Although Barbara is an active member in the San Diego Dahlia Society, she misses the dahlia community we engender up here. We miss her, too.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Lou has almost run out of relatives names to christen his new seedlings so Erik has gotten creative. They've sold "naming rights." Think how many \$1 and \$3 tubers it takes to pay for a single meeting night in Golden Gate Park WITH parking. In one fell swoop Erik and Lou afforded our cozy room FOR A WHOLE YEAR! In another negotiation, they earned the rental of our tuber sale auditorium and ribbons at our show. Wow! So please grow the latest gifts to DSC: EDEN KIRBY honors Kirby Walker who loved the Dahlia garden and lost a long struggle



with cancer 9/4/19. She had brilliant orange hair like the bloom. Her widower husband Paul Danielsen came to the Picnic, and we took a photo of him with "Eden Kirby" in the background--even their dog Rufus has orange hair! See Kirby's obituary:

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/sfgate/obituary.aspx?n=kirby-walker&pid=193638013>

Eden Elizabeth honors the 50th birthday of Elizabeth Spokes, a wonderful Mom in Nicholas classes since kindergarten, who



organized all the parents' events for 12 years.

Erik brought blooms to the wedding of a Med School classmate's daughter in Los Altos, and all were stunned--Needless to say he mentioned naming rights of future cultivars might available for a "quite significant donation".



## NOVEMBER NOSTRUMS

Check out the Dell and you will see 6 patches responding to the waning light differently. Lou's section is literally "going to seed." He lets the blooms wither on their stems; petals drop off, and the seed heads harden. He'll take his picks home, hang them upside down until they are very dry and then separate the chaff from the germinators. You can try this, too. Once the dahlia has



accomplished its evolutionary imperative, the plant slowly turns brown and dries out. At this point these can be cut down to 4-5

notches. Lou sometimes puts plastic bags or tin foil over the tops of the stems so that early rains do not cause crown rot.



Alternately, Sue and my section are still jungles. We've been assiduously deadheading, disbudding and keeping mildew at bay. **CUT BACK TO NEW**

**VIGEROUS GROWTH**, if you want blooms for the Thanksgiving table. Wind causes the most damage now; gusts wrench off branches and dewy blooms become so soggy/heavy they topple taking whole sections of plant with them. **Dahlia Bondage NOW.**

If you have a light source or mini home greenhouse set up, you can take late

season cuttings now. These are sprouts, usually near the bottom of the stalk. I usually wait until there are at least 4 sets of leaves; the cutting crew in the greenhouse in January usually pounces on 3 sets of leaves. Sue dips hers in Rootone, which



purports to enhance root development. I merely pot up mine in small 1x1x2" slender containers with my special potting soil. I use dirt from the Dell plus perlite; it's a light fluffy mix that allows the incipient roots easy penetration and growing room.



Keep them close to the light and moist but not wet. If you're curious, come by the Dell on a Saturday morning and we'll show you how.

**Last chance to ROGUE:** clear out the dahlias that are not good enough to grow next year or sell at our tuber sale. You know

which these are: they never thrived; they were scraggly, their blooms always had something wrong. Get rid of them! **OUT OUT OUT**. If you have 2 or more of the same variety, mark which one performed best. Obviously you would like to grow those again. For example, I have 2 lovely Shea's Rainbows. One had several branches which reverted back to all red. Not good. It is a healthy 5 ½ ' tall plant, so I'll donate the tubers to the "surprise" category. I will grow cuttings from the better, more reliable Shea's Rainbow for myself next year.

**TABLE!** Last chance to check your bloom's conformation against what the ADS

Classification Book tells you it should be. I can't emphasize how important having the correct name is. I write on venetian blinds with a pencil. Paula uses lovely white store-bought tags. Lou, Pat and Sue recycle professional laminated name tags. Phil and Marilyn write on plastic knives. **DO IT NOW** whilst you can still discern key characteristics.



Start looking for mulch and organic matter. Do your neighbors have a deciduous tree you can boost leaves from? Who around you still mows grass? Do you have friends with pet chickens, doves, bunnies or llamas? Talk to your friendly fisherman. Fish heads and guts are heavenly in your garden. These are all prime sources of rich nitrogen and organic goodies. Get creative.

**Cut back on watering. Your dahlias will tell you when they NEED water. Stop fertilizing.**

**Start checking out the dahlia catalogs! Some of them start posting offerings in early November and most by the beginning of December. If there's something you really want, order early!!!!**

**Yours in dirt,**

***Deborah***

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