

Dahlia Society
of California

Dahlia Society of California Newsletter

April 2021



NEXT MEETING: April 13, Tuesday, at 7 PM. Yes, still Zoom.
Topics: Planting at last!
Erik Gaensler is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Topic: My Meeting

Time: Apr 13, 2021 07:00 PM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

Join Zoom Meeting

[https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89605873046?](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89605873046?pwd=MUF5a0ZTL0JoS1dtZnFKTIJHNk5NUT09)

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Meeting ID: 896 0587 3046

Passcode: 136352

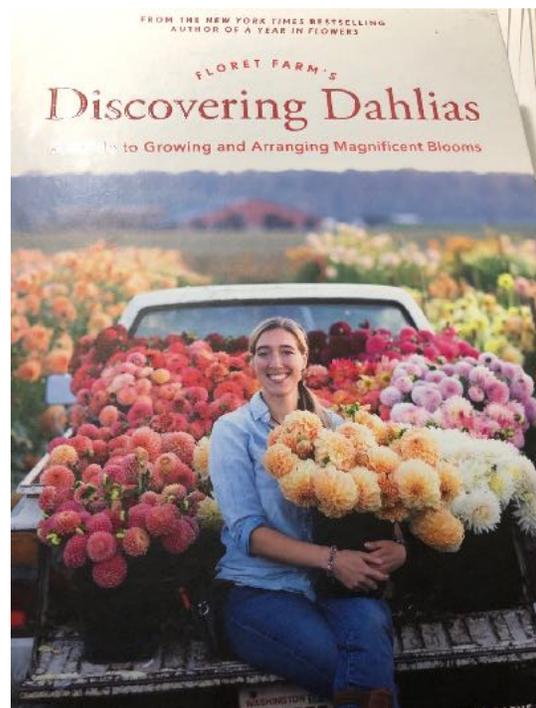
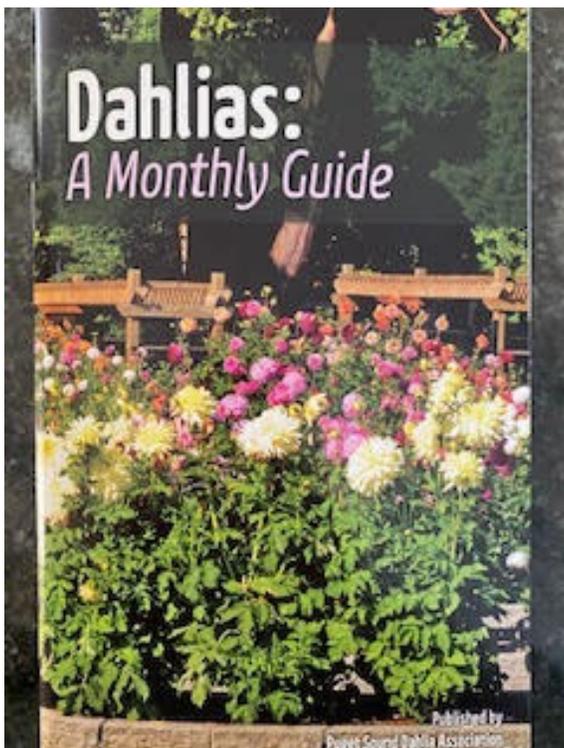
The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting in progress. The main window displays a 3x3 grid of video thumbnails for participants. The names of the participants are visible at the bottom of each thumbnail: Erik Gaensler, Deborah, Tabree Hock, Pat, Karen Sanchez-Correa, and Patti. The bottom of the screen shows the names of the current speaker, 'waskell', and 'colettezee'. On the right side, there is a 'Participants (11)' list with names and status icons. The Windows taskbar is visible at the bottom of the screen.

MARCH ZOOM HIGHLIGHTS

Here are 3 items further elucidated from our March meeting. Thank you to Tara, Karen and Len for your contributions!

FABULOUS SOIL FOUNDATION: Tara sent in this excellent link to an article about what mycorrhiza are, how they were discovered, and what a major scientific role they play in forests and in our gardens. Several places including the ubiquitous Amazon sell powdered mycorrhizae. This is a great addition to the “secret sauce” put in every planting hole. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/12/02/magazine/tree-communication-mycorrhiza.html>

EXPAND YOUR DAHLIA LIBRARY: During our March Zoom meeting, Karen S_C mentioned Dahlias by the Month available through the Puget Sound Dahlia Society. Karen paid \$5 for the booklet, and \$3.50 more for shipping. According to Karen’s book, soil preparation hit the top of the To Do list. Tara added Discovering Dahlias, Growing and Arranging Magnificent Blooms By Floret Farms. Dahlia



photos arranged by color palette make for a novel approach.

PELLETS TO PETALS: During our March meeting, Len mentioned that he planned to experiment with a new type of soil amendment. Thank you Len for this fascinating flight into the world of barn owls.

“AN OWL STORY—by someone who gives a hoot!

I am not a birder in the sense that you might have a preconceived notion of. I do not go chasing after every new sighting. I do not keep a ‘life list.’ I only strive to get the best image of each species that I observe. That’s my goal.



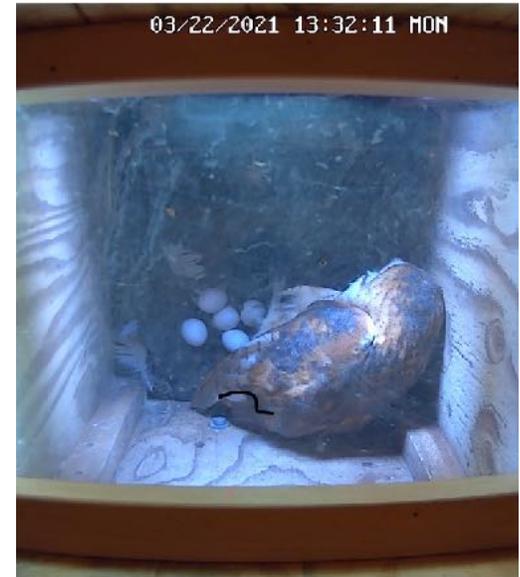
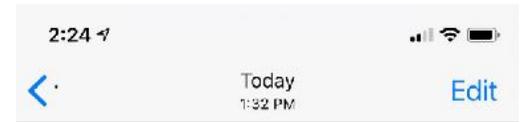
I started birding in 2002 shortly after I retired in 2001, when I turned 60. Presently, for the last 4 years, I have been the Research Chair for the PWA - Petaluma Wetland Alliance. I have been the bird survey compiler and survey coordinator since then of Shollenberger and then Ellis Creek when it opened in 2010. For the last 4 years, I have been the Research Chair for the PW

Note: Owls have 2 stomachs – a creature gets its first digestive treatment in the first stomach. The bones and fur are retained there and the rest of the good stuff goes to the second stomach for its final digestive process. The owl will then cough up a ‘pellet’ which consists of the bones and fur (or feathers) that will not be digested. They are not ‘castings’. That’s what worms produce. It is debris...or a conglomeration of many, many ‘pellets’ which is what owls regurgitate. It consists of the bones, skulls and fur or feathers of their many ‘menu’ items ie. victims.



The PWA installed 3 barn owl houses at Ellis Creek – Shollenberger park since about 2009. The Petaluma Water Recycling Facility installed 16 more in their large plant area. Four years ago they asked if we would care to ‘clean them out,’ a task they would have otherwise had to pay about \$125 per owl house to have done. We jumped at the opportunity since we really wanted to know what was going on in those owl houses. So, I coordinate that task; I weigh the contents of each house as we clean them out each October. The remains of countless creatures the owls consumed are in the contents of the debris in each house. But, although we occasionally found a dead owl chick we never knew how many eggs were laid, how many chicks hatched and how many lived to actually fledge.

That changed in October 2019 when we installed a camcorder in one of these owl houses that had a history of raising chicks. So, for the first time, we could associate the debris from this house with the raising of a known number of chicks. In March 2020, we observed, via the camcorder, that 8 eggs were laid and in April 1; 5 chicks hatched; and by mid-June all 5 chicks fledged. In late October of 2020, we cleaned out this house and retained all the debris in it that cumulatively weighed in at 10.25 pounds. The debris has been thoroughly dissected and we have set aside all of the many, many skulls and lower mandibles in it. The task of identifying each of these creatures will take place over the next few weeks and I expect to have a detailed report on such by the time that the May issue of this news letter is released. To give you an idea of what it might contain, I can tell you that in 2018 we retrieved 9.6 pound of debris from this house but we did not know how many chicks had been raised in it since we did not have a camcorder in it then. But here are the details: 694 individual creatures: 483 Voles; 172 Gophers; 27 mice; 8 Birds; 2 Moles; 1 Rat ; 1 Shrew.



An accumulation of pellets is what composes the debris in an owl house. In prior years, I just disposed of the owl house detritus after we meticulously took it apart and removed each and every skull and lower mandible. This year though, I disposed of the mass of fur and saved the dust & small

pieces that made it through a 1/8” screen sifting process. I mixed it in with my soil I’ll use for planting my dahlias. I hope the dahlias will show their appreciation for all that went into the good earth they will grow in.

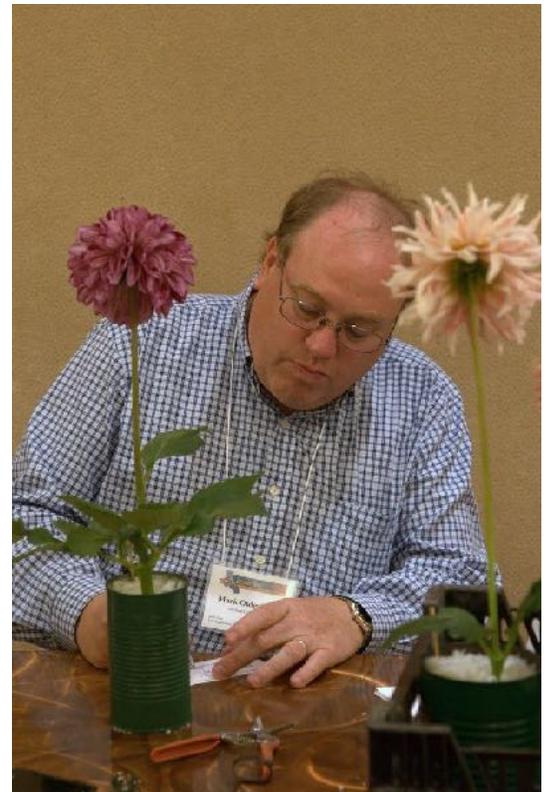
Editor’s Comment:

People experiment with “hot” chicken droppings or the scrapings from a dove cote. Other growers exult in gourmet bunny crud. Some dahliaeners swear by lama “beans.” Certainly fish heads, scales, and bones prove sublime additives to dahlia patches. Crunchy crab carapaces and shrimp tails contribute a special crusty goodness nothing else produces. Zoo poo improves tilth and helps to hold moisture. Pulverized mousy craniums should be a lovely source of calcium and the feathers an excellent repatriation of nitrogen. Please, Len, tell us what your Owl House Magic pellets do to your dahlia crop this summer.

WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS

Check out this wonderful YouTube video Larry Smith shot of Mark Oldenkamp taking cuttings in his dark dark basement. Mark Oldenkamp, long-time San Leandro Dahlia Society member until he moved to Portland, has been our generous Fairy Dahlia Godfather for many years providing our greenhouse cutting team with wonderful new and cool pot roots to take our own cuttings from. Thank you, Mark!! Thank you, Larry!

<https://youtu.be/i2hFvm6MMig>



WONDEROUS VISIONS

This is the last month of arresting dahlias from last year. Soon they will be replaced by YOUR picture of YOUR dahlias growing in YOUR yard. Enjoy.



Jowey Winnie



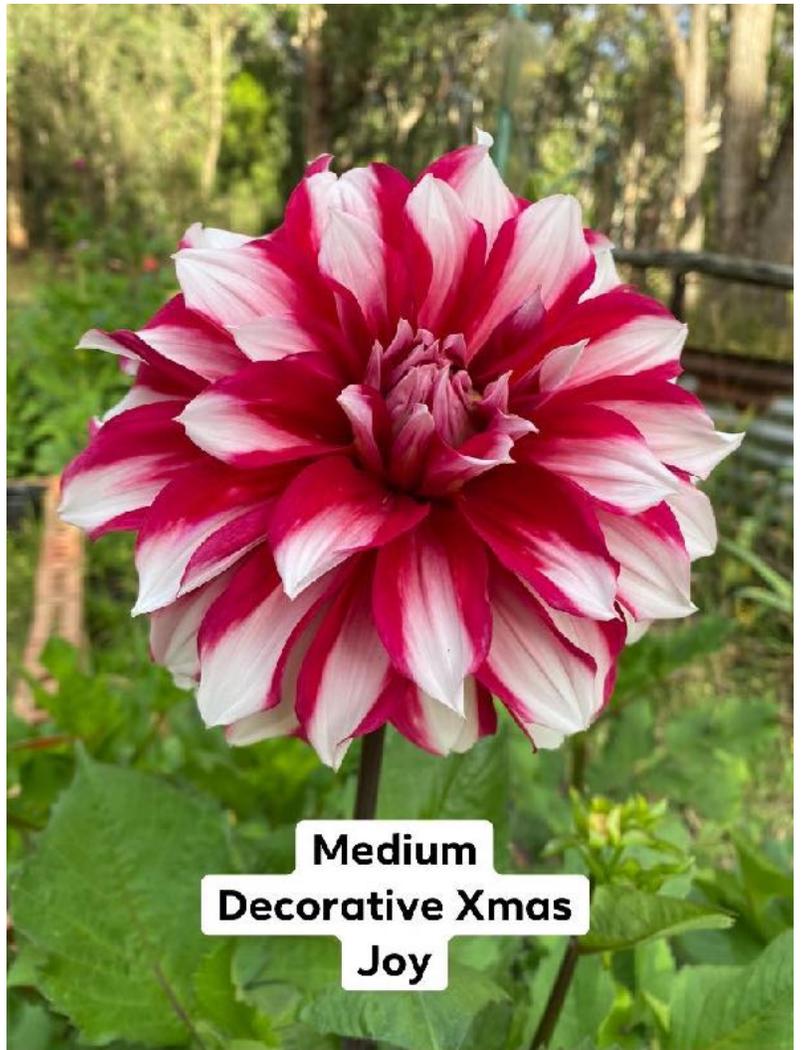
Taum Sauk



Seven Year Itch



Wanda's Aurora



Medium
Decorative Xmas
Joy

SAN LEANDRO ONLINE DAHLIA BAZAAR

Good News! San Leandro Dahlia Society opens its on-line tuber and cutting sale April 22-29 after spending 6 weeks gathering items. We will send out a blitz with the Bazaar on-line url as soon as they give it to us. So order as soon as you can. Every order will have its own delivery time-slot for pick up somewhere near the Oakland Zoo on May 1. Maybe a couple of you can go in together so that only one person has to cross the bridge to acquire all the plants and tubers.

LONG BEACH VA BOTANICAL EDEN

Bob Papp recently toured Deborah around the Veteran's Administration Botanical Preserve in Long Beach, SoCal. After

a picnic lunch in the gazebo with the VA apiarist, we pilgrimaged to the dahlia greenhouse full of Van Borgondien tubers. Bob set his tubers out on wide flats with a very light potting mix and stacked them on shelves after soaking them in a bath of liquid Orca mycorrhizae. As they began to



germinate, he transferred each tuber to a milk carton or a one-gallon pot. Next, we assessed the raised beds built for wheelchair bound vets so they could help with potting projects and enjoy flowers at their sight level. We toured

beds of lemon grass, self-seeding basil, and checked out Bob's use of horizontal hog wire as a stiff version of Hortonova. He used notched PVC pipe to hold it at the 18-20" height. Bob prepared 5-6 long beds to be filled with hundreds of dahlias soon. Towards the back of the acreage, a Vietnamese vet had planted



many different types of banana trees; his generosity of sweat yields fruit year after year.

DAHLIA DELL DOINGS

Spring is springing at the Dell. The most beautiful news is that David Zhang has sanded, primed and painted our tear drop fence, all sponsored by Phil and Marilyn. This took months of arm wrestling with bureaucrats.

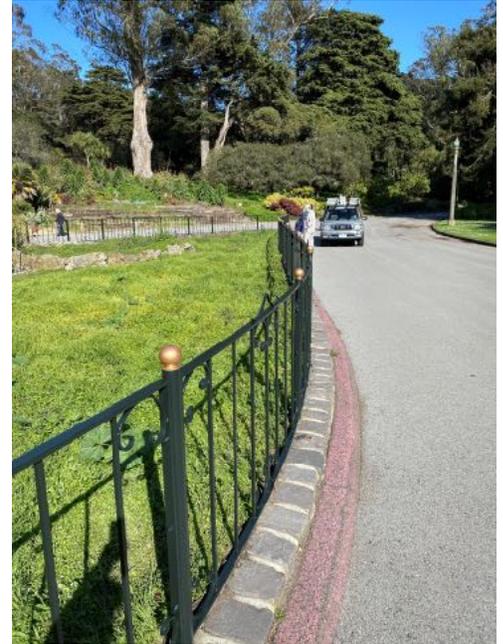
MONTHS! The final sign off came on a Friday with a representatives from the Dell gardeners, the park police, the park volunteers, the parks alliance, the park planners, the superintendent, the painter, and the donors: 10 in all. They stood around and discussed how the painter needed a convoy to escort him in and out each day.

However, the fence is gorgeous, especially the golden finials.

Deborah has 30 sophomores and 27 gallon pots up. She is valiantly performing field dividing a couple times a week. She would welcome help with weeds (by arrangement,



please.) Over night, Lou's lush pasture got churned up by the park's rototiller vaqueros. Pat comes to weed her patch, chat with her adoring public, and to look for nascent shoots amongst her



clumps left in. Sue already has a few dahlias interred. Erik and Nick have been weeding and pulling up some

of their overwintered stock. Maggie dropped by with Bea Paradise tubers and wonderful company. The fire department practiced maneuvers again upon a gorgeous Tuesday afternoon. Thanks to Loren for his cool weed yanker tool donation.



FINAL TRONCHE OF FANCY FLOWERS



Devon Toledo



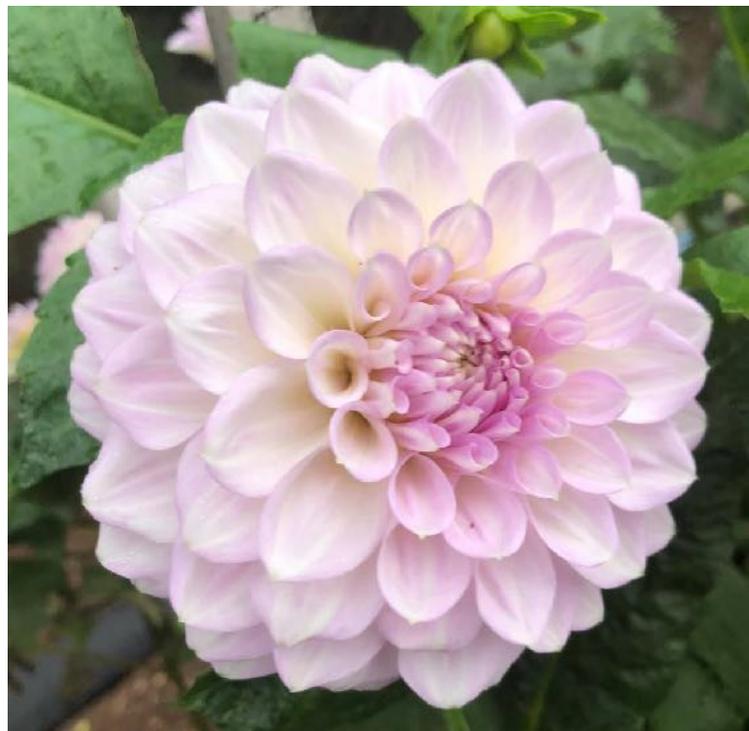
Mexican Star



Bloomquist Tory



China Town



Wakefield Blush

AWESOME APRIL

Kablowie! Everything explodes in April. Your tubers should be forming green—even long white—nubs to shoots now. If not, try Erik’s trick: cover them with a damp towel and place in a warm spot. Rewet the cloth each day. You will be amazed how well this works. Here is Paula’s new plan to awaken her new acquisition\$:

“Here is a photo of my set up for new tubers . The container is actually part of my worm bin, 2 foot round with teeny holes in the



bottom, 7 inches tall. Its elevated 4 to 5" off my heating pad and under lights that are on 24/7. A quality potting soil fills half the container while the rest is filled with half potting soil mixed with planting soil from my raised bed. Just an experiment to see if



one medium is superior. The tubers are buried about 1 to 2 inches down with their necks just peeking out.” Let us know the results, please, Paula.

Once your tubers have sprouted, pot them up in a light rooting medium. I like 1/3 soil, 1/3 sand and 1/3 perlite or vermiculite. You can stash them in milk cartons, 4”x4’s or gallon pots. Add VERY LITTLE

water until the tuber has developed the roots to absorb the moisture. In the beginning, a daily spritz suffices. You might put all these containers together on one black flat, which would make it easier to put out in the sunshine every day and bring in from the cold every night. Gradually leave your young plants out longer and longer until you have fully “hardened them off” and they can tolerate temperature shifts from day to night to day again. I transitioned a couple of my hearty dahlias from the greenhouse to the sunlight a bit too precipitously; they suffered sunburn and lost leaves. They looked pathetic but revived after a couple weeks. Whew.

HOW TO CARE FOR CUTTINGS: If you buy sprouted cuttings, they will arrive in the mail in plastic “clamshells.” You will see wee fine rootlets weaving through grey oasis. **IMMEDIATELY** transfer these plantitos to 4”x4 containers filled with rooting mixture. I like to put mine in my greenhouse under lights for a couple more weeks. In lieu of a greenhouse, put outside in a

sunny spot during the day and bring in at night for another 2-3 weeks; then begin hardening them off. These clamshell cuttings are touted as being planting-ready; theoretically you could put them right into your garden. (But there's a certain casualty rate associated with this sink or swim treatment.)

WATER IMMEDIATELY! Each day these new plantlings will need water; they will adore your spritzing. I prefer the pump action 1-gallon for @\$5 at Lowes. For cuttings already in 4x4's, check to see if roots are reaching out through the bottom. You hope the entire container will be filled with roots when you plant them out.

PLANTING: Yes, you can plant tubers directly into your garden. However, the reason I pot mine up in advance is that I can control warmer temperature, judicious moisture, and pests far better in house than out in the ground. Some poor tubers will sleep in the cold earth and take months to warm up; they will get too much rain and turn to mush. Their little sprouts will barely emerge but a snail or earwig will gobble it down. So that's why I like to only plant root-filled containers with strong, happy stems with 4-6 sets of leaves. I pull off the bottom most set of leaves and bury that node; that is where the tubers for next year will grow. Some people wonder why they do not get tubers from cuttings. They did not plant them deep enough for that critical node to be underground.

SECRET SAUCE: Since we are all growing clones of the top varieties, what makes the difference between a nice specimen and a winner????? That distinction begins with what you put in your planting hole. I use a balanced fertilizer, 4-4-4 or 12-12-12 just so all the numbers are about the same. I put in about a teaspoon of sulfur or cinnamon—very cheap at Costco. I also toss a pinch of mycorrhizae, the magic underground fungal network. Amazon and several botanical outlets like Arbico

Organics sell this now. I use the powdered type. Bob uses a liquid version. Swish your special goodies up and pound in your stake **BEFORE** you think about interring your new plant. Drop your complete block of roots into the hole; fill past that critical node. Gently water. **LABEL IMMEDIATELY**. Surround with Sluggo Plus. Collette spotted Sluggo Plus at the downtown Costco for \$18! Wow. I use repurposed venetian blinds for labels. I write with pencil—it does not fade like a Sharpie. John Morton recommends tying the metal venetian blind piece to a metal stake. Purportedly the “music” of the clang in the wind and the vibration it causes is not pleasant for gophers, moles and voles???? Since Loren just gave me another shank of discarded venetian blinds, let me know if you need some for your own labels.

WATERING SYSTEMS: Bottom water is essential for dahlias. Big blooms will snap off if be-laden with heavy moisture. Pat and the Hillside girls use a drip system. It’s good to use the variable emitters that regulate the amount of water so you can give a little water to a small, young dahlia and bigger gulps to more mature plants on the same drip line. This also saves water by putting the right amount of water in the right place and not overflowing onto pavement. Some people engineer a “fertigation” system whereby they can judiciously add fertilizer or other liquid amendments through their watering lines. I use PVC pipes whereby I can control each sprayer head and plant in long troughs. **DO NOT OVERHEAD WATER!!** Lou digs basins around the bases of each dahlia pair and hand-waters with a hose. He likes to personally **LOOK** at each plant each week to keep abreast of development and pests.

My loft is full of milk cartons. Each week is like Easter—full of wonderful discoveries. The greenhouse is choc-a-block crammed with cuttings. Suddenly I am running out of

“hardening” spots for them—a great problem to have. Loved having double-jabbed Soc visit with a bunch of containers and milk cartons for perpetuating the madness. And still I look at other growers’ greenhouses with cutting envy—like thinking about my next meal at a feast. Crazy. Dahliamania.



Yours in dirt,

Deborah

Photo credits: Buzan, Cornett, Davis, Dietz, Donahue, East Hill Floral, Fisher, Funai, Gaensler, Joyce, Ligenberg, Lim, Mariott,

Nelson, Pendilla, Quinn, Sanchez-Corea, Showcase Dahlias, Spangenberg, Thompson, Zhang

Layout artist and Membership wrangler: Devorah

Snail Mail Benefactrix: Patricia



