



# ***Dahlia Society of California Newsletter***



**HOLIDAY PARTY!!! Dec. 9. An hour earlier at 6:30 so we have more time to have more fun. 9th and Lincoln with parking off 10th and Lincoln. Please bring a delicious something to share. If we have 47 salads we will be a very healthy group; and if, per chance, we have 47 desserts we'll surely be a very happy group. Surprise us! For sure Erik will bring a whole ham and Lola has promised a whole turkey! Great start. If you choose to play, please bring a wrapped gift (\$20ish value) for our infamous Present Predation game. In the past stolen items included dahlia mugs, dahlia calendars, baskets of bulbs, loppers, an odd garden frog, and inexplicably a purple Warriors T-shirt. Do don your gay apparel: hats, sparkles, even elf ears. Tis the season! Sparkle!**

## **DIG, DIVIDE, LABEL, STORE: THE LOU PARADISE WAY**

**"This is not a flower," Lou stated holding up a perfectly fine late season dahlia. What???? The point our**



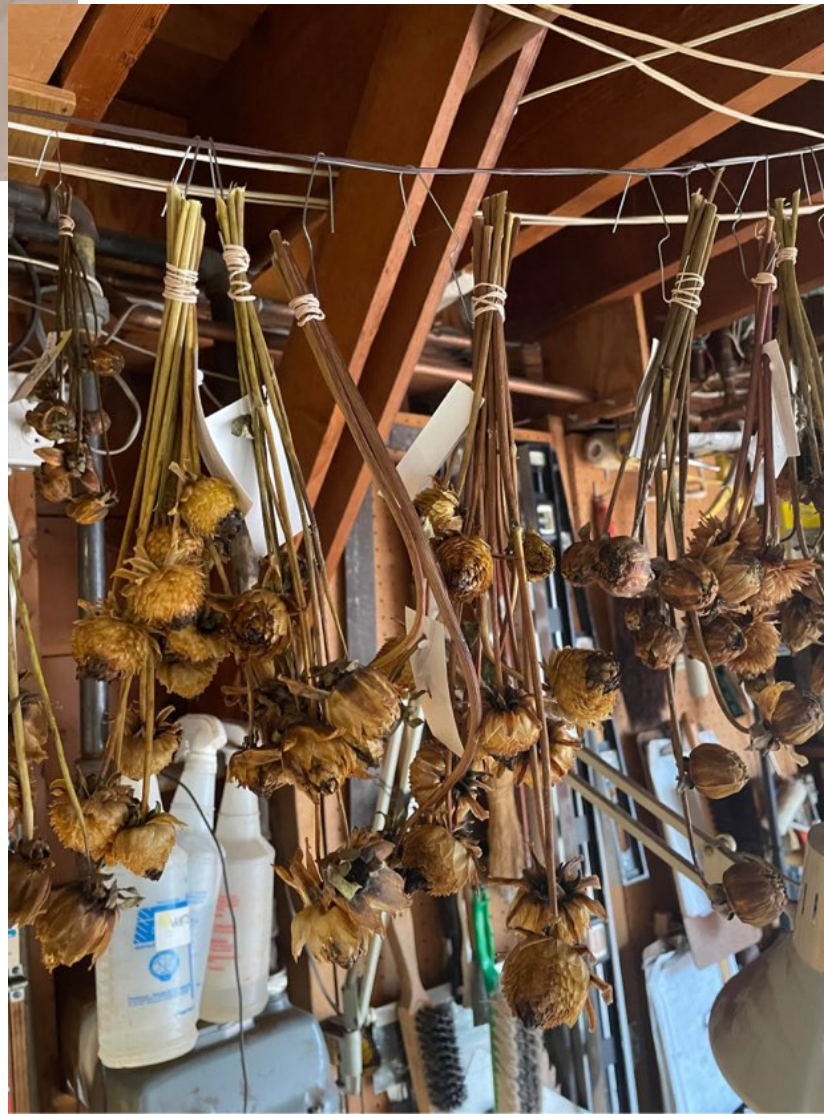




Classification Guru was making is that dahlias are members of the family *compositae* because they are composed of many many ray florets which are individual flowers taxsonomicly speaking. He showed us how he bundles seed heads from the same variety and then hangs them upside down from a paper clip on a strung wire to dry. On a bright white paper towel, Lou mushed up a wrinkled brown seed head;

then he scrunched and twisted for a while leaving a pile of chaff and seeds. Putting these all in his palms, he gently blew off the lighter fluff resulting in a handful of lovely black seeds. Lou warned that even with hand pollination, only about 4-6% of the resulting plants might ultimately look promising as competitive dahlias. Long odds; gorgeous potential.

Whisking away his seedy mess, Lou unfolded his cardboard







operating arena complete with his many tools. He particularly favored an apricot knife. He cuts down to 4-5 nodes to ensure at least 3-4 water stops between the cut and the buried crown; otherwise rain or even heavy Bay Area morning dew can drip down to the heart of the clump and rot the whole trove out. Lou recommended leaving the clumps in 2-3 weeks after cutting back although he allowed that many

people cut one day and harvest the next. He demonstrated with decisive karate hands how he stabs his shovel straight down in a wide circle around the brown stalk severing all the roots. Only then does he use 2 shovels in opposition to prize up the clump, being mindful to not break fragile necks in the wrenching from the earth. With Mini's great close up camera work, Lou pointed out all the eyes on a given clump. These eyes



only appear for the first few hours after DigOut, so it's best to process one clump at a time keeping track of the label every step of the way. Lou talked about his 10% bleach solution bath for 10 minutes. While still wet, the Bottle of Ink in a Pencil indelible markers name the tuber without breaking the skin. He doses the exposed wounds with cinnamon. "There's some antibacterial property and besides it smells better than sulfur," Lou smiles. Lou puts most of his tubers on the cutting bench to make plants for our Tuber Sale. He uses a combination of vermiculite and peat moss in ziplock bags to store personal tubers. "Most of the rot will occur within the first 3 weeks, if it's going to happen," so Lou recommends checking your stash about then to remove any untoward squishy roots lest they infect their fellows. "This is how I process my dahlias. Other people do it differently." It surely works for Lou!

## **ELECTION RESULTS**

Thank you to Brigid who spent the last month soliciting candidates and organizing a ballot. Here are our results:

President	Erik Gaensler
1st Vice President	Debby Frank
2nd Vice President	Jennifer Tobiason
Treasurer	Joe Norton
Recording Secretary	Sarah Smith
Corresponding Secretary	Deborah Dietz

## **Board Members for 2026-2027**

Tim Wong, Brigid Ide, Mini Kurhan, Karen Sanchez-Corea

## **2025-2026**

Lou Paradise, Lucy Waskell, Jenna Kaiser, Tara Donahue

Thank you to all who accepted the extra mantle of responsibility. Our DSC looks so effortlessly smooth, kind of like a serene swan gliding across the pond: no one sees the frantic flapping of its feet under the surface.





## **HARVEST TREATS FOR OUR HEARTIES**

**My goodness, Pat, what a fantastic tray of assorted brownies! Allison and Alex's and Anita's homemade chocolate chip cookies disappeared fast. Brigid baked up such fun confetti shortbread confections. John and Annette shared a whole jar of Madeleines. Peggy perked us up with warm coffee and Tim, bless you! shared spirits of the season with a little box of rose. MMMMM Your sense of community tastes soooooo goood.**

## **GALL BOLO: BE ON THE LOOKOUT**

**Leafy gall has many sprouts at the stem base, while crown gall has bulbous growths on the root. Both are caused by bacteria. This disease lives on the surface of the plant. It can be transmitted by**





gloves,  
snips, and other garden tools, only  
when the plant is somehow



pierced. So particularly when you are dividing, use alcohol, peroxide, bleach or some of the various “botanical disinfectants” that are available in liquid or wipes form. Have at least two of each tool so one tool can always be steeping in decontamination. Leafy gall looks like a riot of little shoots, strings or almost barnacles. You can suspect crown gall when you spot odd bulges. Sometimes a tuber clump will just naturally have one or two





tubers that are bigger than the others; they look just like the other tubers but are larger. They are NOT crown gall. If you happen to dig up a clump with leafy gall, immediately put it in a plastic bag. Also bag up a couple shovels full of the soil around it. Put these in the trash, NOT the compost. Disinfect the tools you used and your hands immediately. Try to let that spot go fallow for at least the winter season if not an entire year; gall cannot







thrive without vegetable matter to feast upon. Can you spot the leafy gall in these photos? The crown gall? The last two pix are big fat happy tubers. Note that the little chubby “legs” are not needed and can be cut off before storage. They are not essential.

## PRETTY COOL HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

Jim

Kochevar writes, “You will never regret buying a \$30 pair of high resolution plastic glasses. These come with 5 different lenses that will magnify a dahlia eye to the size of a golf ball. All kinds of prices at Amazon.” Carol and Jennifer found darling garden overalls on PoshMart. Jenna swears by Etsy for dahlia swag items. My BE-all for dividing is an oscillating tool; mine



is a Dremel but there are many other manufacturers and some are rechargeable. Makes dividing soon much easier! DJ built my first screen; then Loren improved it; finally



Jen developed the Rolls Royce version of the ultimate dahlia screen. Guy erected a huge screen at the perfect height to clean off tubers as we dug them out. Never doubt how handy a hori hori knife can be. Antoinette recommends her kneelie with pouch. These are the sort of sugarplums that dance in dahlianista heads.

## DREAMING OF DAHLIA



## DINING

Erik says he's still tasting the glorious repast at Le Bristol that he and Shelly enjoyed on their Parisian trip last summer. Besides





splendid food, they loved the gustatory experience amidst dahlias on every wall.

## LOVLY LOFTY TREE DAHLIAS

When most of our garden dahlias begin to grow spindly, the magnificent tree dahlias push to over 25 feet tall bearing either lavender or white double or single blooms. They will continue their show through April or May. Check out the tree dahlias

blooming near the Dell.



Marilyn and Phil love the beauty of



their double white all winter long. BTW, Deborah still has two double whites in gallon pots for sale. Just in case...

## OVER HILL AND DELL



The season has turned brown. Tim has begun lifting his favorite clumps and chosen seedlings already. Sarah has culled a few and has begun processing hers one clump at a time. Although she's removed her stellar labels, Sue lets her tubers harden their skins before meticulously performing surgery and storing them in sand. Lou has already begun lifting clumps; his section looks like bombs exploded hither and yon. Cut down, Tinnee and Jerry's plants are still green but half their old size. They are forcing their treasures to go into dormancy before they begin their DigOut. Both Lou and





**Tinnee put most of their clumps directly on the cutting bench in the greenhouse beginning in January. To catch the last blooms and celebrate Ray's birthday, Joshua bought up prime dahlia choices. Deborah's section continues to put forth Jessica, Blomquist**

**Jeff, Belle of the Ball, Sandia Day Dream, KA's Peppercorn, Hollyhill Dragon Fire, and astonishingly huge Pennhill Watermelons. Knowing that with this spate of rain, every weed left will metastasize into 200 weeds if left unchecked, Laila and Jennifer declared a weed pogrom. While**







deadheading and disbudding, Carol and Steve stayed alert for exposed tubers and covered them up with compost. Nicole weeded all the pots and topped their soil levels off, snuggling them down for winter. Antoinette purged weeds voraciously. With 27 still in

bloom as of Thanksgiving, we are hoping for a few blooms on our holiday party table. Cross your petals!

## DESCENDING INTO DECEMBER TO DIG OR NOT TO DIG?

**Why would you NOT dig out?** 1. You have well drained soil, so your tubers will not rot no matter how much rain they get. 2. You planted everything new last year; thus the tuber mass shouldn't wax too ginormous. 3. You've lost all your labels so you have to wait until they bloom again to finally put names to them. (What's your excuse??) If you choose to leave your clumps in the ground to overwinter, you might cover everything with a few inches of leaves or grass clippings. Phil dumps bags of chicken manure on his dormant hangovers. Some people put 5 gallon buckets over



each clump to protect them from some rain. These act as mini greenhouses in the spring to help warm up the soil.

### **Why SHOULD you dig out?**

1. Protect your treasures from predation or death by mushy

disintegration.

2. Divide your trove and share/swap with friends and your wonderful Dahlia Society. 3. You could replant with spring bulbs. 4. Most importantly, by digging out, you can add nutrients, mychorhizae and trace elements; basically, restock a hungry dahlia pantry so your hearty NEW dahlias will feast all season anew. As Lou stated, "There are many ways to process and store dahlias for the winter." However, he was pretty adamant about not digging up more than you can process in one day. The internet is full of dahlia farmers mechanically tumbling their clumps out of the earth and storing hundreds of hosed off masses in barns for processing through the winter. I prefer to dig only what I can process the same day because the eyes disappear within 10-15 hours of exposure. Moreover, roots left out to dry get very tough and harder to divide. Sometimes I put a shovel full of dirt into a 5-







gallon bucket; gently place the clump with as much dirt around it as possible; then add another shovel full of dirt. The dahlia will feel as though it were still in the ground. You can store these for as long as you need. In fact, this is a great way to protect them for the whole winter if you only have a few. I can wait for a sunny moment of apricity on my deck and divide in comfort and beauty.

**WHEN should you dig out?** The Bay Area rarely endures a frost, so technically you have until next April to process your tubers. When your bushes turn completely brown for at least 3 weeks, you can begin pulling them out. I like to disinter mine starting the beginning of February when a few have even sent up green shoots, making where to cut sooo obvious. If you dig now, you need to know how to preserve them until April. Remember eyes are found **ONLY** on the neck close to the crown; bumps anywhere else are probably lenticles caused by excessive moisture. Cover your exposed tuber cuts in cinnamon or sulfur. Let dry at least over night and up to two days depending on where you live. Different areas have different levels of humidity. Kristine Albrecht



has  
wonderful  
short videos  
about digging  
up and  
dividing.

**How should  
you store  
tubers?** On  
line you will  
see photo  
after photo of  
shelves full of  
plastic shoe  
boxes filled  
with tubers  
and  
vermiculite.  
This is an  
excellent way  
to overwinter  
your tuber  
trove. Some  
people use  
peat moss,  
guinea pig



shavings or shredded newspaper. My brother Mike in Boise just plunked his divided tubers in 5 gallon plastic buckets with NO medium at all: naked! However, the humidity at that altitude is nil. He never had to worry about rot. His big concern was keeping tubers above freezing. Our Bay Area problem is keeping ours cool (40-45 degrees); too warm and they will sprout way too soon. After I have soaked my tubers in 10% bleach for 10-15 minutes and let them dry 1-2 days depending on the weather, I place them in big zip lock baggies filled with vermiculite. I buy the 4' tall huge





bag of course vermiculite on line—so much less expensive than those pitifully small bags at our local nurseries.



Check your tubers once a month until planting time. Go back through other years of our newsletter for December and January versions. You will be surprised at the wonderful information that we shared over time.

**When to buy tubers?** The internet is exploding with people selling tubers as fast as they can dig them up. This is nuts!!! Of course, sellers would rather not have to store all those potatoes when they could make immediate money, but what will you do with December tubers??? I much prefer to buy tubers in the spring when I can plant them immediately. I want to know they've survived the problems of storage for a few months already. Oh temptations everywhere!!! Let me know from whom you've successfully purchased tubers or cuttings in the past and I'll list your recommendations in our newsletter in January.





## LATE SEASON CUTTINGS

Now is the time to snip off little sprigs at the base of your tuber clumps, particularly those tubers that were really expensive or those that make desultory roots. I put them in 1x1x3" starter pots in 1/3 perlite and 2/3 rich soil. (Perlite holds up to 5x the amount of moisture as soil.) These then go into my greenhouse under 14 hour lights. You can put a few in your warmest window or rig up lights over a shelf. You don't need a fancy greenhouse to cosset a few special cuttings through the winter—just a little ingenuity.



**Cover Crop?**

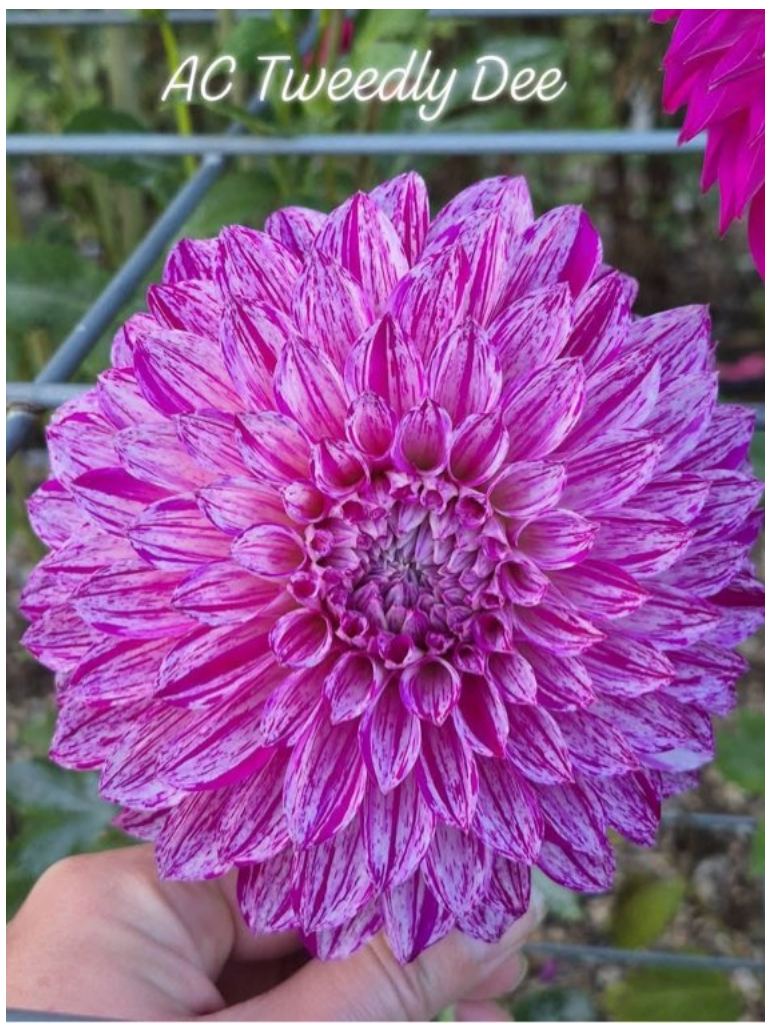




Once your tubers are out of the ground, you might consider sowing clover, mustard seed, fava or other legumes to reseason your plot. Many beans nab nitrogen from the air and store it underground at the roots. Certain mustard seed acts like an antibiotic and clean up your dirt. Moreover, something green is **ALWAYS** lovelier to contemplate than soggy mucky brown. As we finish off the year, here is a parade of snazzy dahlias that caught my fancy in 2025.



*AC Alysia*



*AC Tweedly Dee*





**Allen's Wild River with frog**

**Alpen Bill**



**Appaloosa**



*Bella Cruella*





**Yours in dirt,  
Deborah**

**Photo credits: Bergman, Debie, Dietz, Evans, Gaensler, Kaiser,  
Kelly, Smith**



**Meticulous Proof Reader:  
Steve**







**Can you spot the seeds?  
Famous Dahlia Lottery tickets**





**URL Nailerdowner: Mini**