



# DAHLIA SOCIETY OF GEORGIA NEWSLETTER

EMBRACE BB-SC-Y

Volume 7, Issue 3

May/June, 2009

FLOWER OF THE YEAR

WWW.DAHLIASOCIETYOFGEORGIA.ORG

## APRIL TUBER SALE GREAT...NEW FORMAT FOR MAY

We had lots of tubers at the April Auction and lots of buyers, around 50. Due to the number of tubers and lateness of the evening we were unable to auction about half of the tubers so it became a real sale with people paying what they thought the tuber was worth. WHAT A GOOD DEAL! We are going to change the format for the May sale and Paula Pinholster has written an article explaining the procedures: **"TUBER AUCTION" CHANGED TO "TUBER SALE"**

The Georgia Dahlia Society will have dahlia tubers for sale at their meeting on May 18, 2009 at the Atlanta Botanical Gardens. The organizers of the May program have decided to include a new format for selling dahlia tubers. Instead of offering all of the tubers

in an auction format, some of the tubers will be labeled and priced in advance. The program will begin with an auction format where AA, A, and B size dahlias with only one tuber of a variety being available will be auctioned. After these single tubers have been auctioned, buyers will finish making their selections from the supply of tubers on the tables. The price of each tuber will be \$3.00. There will be pictures of most of the varieties that are up for sale, and experienced growers will be available to answer questions and to help buyers make selections  
**CONT ON PAGE 2**



TUBERS AND ATTENDEES READY FOR THE APRIL 2009 TUBER AUCTION. WE HAD LOTS OF TUBERS IN APRIL AND WILL NEED MANY FOR THE MAY SALE, SO MEMBERS, BRING YOUR TUBERS.

**MAY MEETING**

**MONDAY, MAY 18**

**7:30 PM**

**ATL BOTANICAL GARDEN**

**TUBER SALE/AUCTION**

**JUNE MEETING**

**MONDAY, JUNE 15**

**7:30 PM**

**ATL BOTANICAL GARDEN**

### 2009 CALENDAR

#### MAY/SEPT

**MAY 18,**

**TUBER SALE/  
AUCTION, ABG**

**JUNE 15,**

**MONTHLY MEETING**

**ABG**

**JULY**

**ANNUAL**

**PICNIC, TBA**

**AUGUST 17,**

**MONTHLY MEETING**

**ABG**

**SEPTEMBER**

**GA SOUTHERN**

**STATES DAHLIA**

**SHOW**

**SEPT 26-27**

**ABG EXHIBIT HALL**

The program chairperson and other organizers hope this change will improve the sale of tubers by speeding up the process, evening up the price of tubers, and insuring each buyer the tubers of his/her choice.

Mid-May is a good time to plant dahlia tubers in North Georgia. The ground is warm, and the days are sunny. This is a perfect combination for the start of a healthy, vigorous dahlia plant. Most of the tubers will have a one or two inch sprout and be ready for planting. So, dahlia lovers have your flower beds ready to plant your new dahlias right away. Looking forward to seeing you at the meeting.

## WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

NANCY BEAVERS  
 STOCKBRIDGE, GA  
 GRAHAME GOODWIN  
 BRUNDIDGE, AL  
 VALERIE STEWART  
 DUNWOODY, GA

WELCOME TO THE DAHLIA SOCIETY OF GEORGIA AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO YOUR PARTICIPATION.

## PARKING AT THE ABG

The parking deck at the ABG has been completed and is open for business as of Saturday, May 2nd. The bad news is there is no more free parking at the ABG even on Monday nights as the parking deck is open 24/7. The good news is that we won't have a problem finding a parking place most of the time. This is an improvement that has been needed for a long time so it is finally here.

Below is a website you can go to for information

[Http://WWW.atlantabotanicalgarden.org/pdf/SAGE\\_ParkingFacilityFAQ.pdf](http://WWW.atlantabotanicalgarden.org/pdf/SAGE_ParkingFacilityFAQ.pdf)

|                                              |         |
|----------------------------------------------|---------|
| The rate structure is as follows: 1st 15 Min | FREE    |
| First 30 minutes                             | \$.75   |
| Each Additional 30 minutes                   | \$1.00  |
| Max per day                                  | \$15.00 |

You can purchase multi use parking passes for parking at the ABG Gift Shop or on line at [www.atlantabotanicalgarden.org](http://www.atlantabotanicalgarden.org) or at [www.piedmontpark.org](http://www.piedmontpark.org). The cost will be

| VISITS | COST | MEMBER PRICE | MEM COST PER VISIT |
|--------|------|--------------|--------------------|
| 5      | \$20 | \$16         | \$ 3.20            |
| 10     | \$38 | \$30         | \$ 3.00            |
| 25     | \$65 | \$65         | \$ 2.60            |

|     |       |         |
|-----|-------|---------|
| 50  | \$125 | \$ 2.50 |
| 100 | \$200 | \$ 2.00 |

Parking passes are good for one year from date of purchase and then a new one must be purchased. We recommend you purchase a multi visit pass so you won't have to worry about running up a parking bill based on time spent in the garden.

## MAY- DAHLIA PLANTING BEGINS

I usually recommend mid May as the start point for planting dahlias because of the threat of late frost and cool soil temperatures. This past winter had some really cold spells that hopefully killed off some of the dormant troublesome insects. I use a soil thermometer to let me know when the soil has reached the desired 70 degrees. On one hand, we have had an abundance of much needed winter rains; on the other, the soil can be worked only if it's dry enough to allay concerns of compacting. At the same time the cool temperatures at night have been great for hardening off any plants or potted tubers. General guidelines- If you've done your homework then you know that your bed should have already been prepared in a sunny location that will get **AT LEAST ½ DAY OF SUN**. It will not be in the lowest spot of the garden but instead, it should be where good drainage exists or where you've already considered that and have provided for good drainage in some manner.

**DAHLIAS DO NOT LIKE WET FEET!** Once summer sets in dahlias will grow extremely quickly and many can reach a height of between 3' and 7'. You will need to provide some support system in order to keep the growth off of the ground. You can use anything as simple as a wooden or metal (rebar) stake or even a more elaborate devise such as a tomato cage. **SET YOUR STAKING SYSTEM BEFORE YOU PLANT THE DAHLIAS!** Stakes have been known to find and destroy planted dahlias. I speak from personal experience. Some people use tomato cages to support their dahlia plants. If you have already **IMPROVED THE SOIL IN YOUR PLANTING AREA WITH ANY NUMBER OF ENRICHING ORGANIC MATTER** then plant the dahlias in a hole about 3"- 4" deep. If you are planting tubers directly in the hole you do not need to add fertilizer at this time because the tuber supplies any needed food and most moisture. Gently refill the soil over the tuber while avoiding disturbing any young eyes or sprouts that have appeared on the tuber. I recommend only partially fill the hole initially, adding soil gradually as the plant begins to grow. If any eye or sprout has

been knocked off, they will regenerate themselves quickly and continue to grow. In fact I will eliminate all but one or two eyes before planting tubers so the remaining eye(s) will get full advantage of food and water. You do not need to water planted tubers at this time.

The same method goes for any tubers you may have previously potted in order to begin the “awakening process”. Gently tap the root /tuber mass out of the pot and place in the bottom of the hole. It is fine if any sprouts protrude above the top of the hole because that will provide you with an indication of the dahlia’s health. You should water in this root/tuber mass to help it get off to a quick start. A handful of slow release fertilizer at planting time, left on the surface, is a good step at this time.

I often plant the started tubers and root ball deeper than a tuber with only an eye showing. Dahlias have a lot of similar characteristics as tomato plants. You may want to plant a started tuber with a 10” shot at a depth of 6” – 8”, leaving only the top pair of leaves and growth tip; tomatoes like to be planted deeply, too. By doing this you will help the plant establish an early, strong system of roots. Why? Because where each leaf meets the stalk, dahlias have the ability to produce roots or laterals. When placed under the ground it will produce more roots. Those junctions of leaves above the ground will make branches (laterals). Roots help feed and collect water for the overall plant and the more roots, the healthier and more productive will be your dahlias.

If you have created or acquired any dahlia plants then a small handful or less of fertilizer can be worked into the soil used to cover the base of the dahlia plant in the planting hole. Use a general, balanced fertilizer such as 8-8-8 or 12-12-12. As a precaution against burning of the new leaves by the midday sun, provide some type of cover over these plants for about 48 hours. You can use something as simple as a piece of wood or a cardboard box. Lean them or other items against the stake. This protection will allow the young plants to adjust to their new settings with the minimum of damage. Here again the plant will provide you with a visual indicator of its overall health.

At this time let me make two suggestions. Hold back several tubers or plants to replace any that fail to make it. At this month’s auction buy several extra dahlias because as with any other flower, dahlias are subject to rot or other damage at various times throughout the growing season. Planting time is an “at risk” time until the dahlias acclimate to their new surroundings. Late spring storms are common and can seriously damage young, tender plants. I’m sure you’ve experienced sudden, unexplained plant dieback. It is always good to have some substitutes available. Second, as an experiment, I challenge you to leave a plant or two or a started dahlia tuber or two in the pot. Any size pot will do. Plant the entire pot in the ground, covering to slightly over the top of the pot. Keep track of which ones are still in the pot. Experience has shown that there will be no discernable difference

in the growth nor bloom production of these plants and, in the case your garden is visited by tuber eating voles ( photo on left), the pot will stop these eating machines from feasting on your dahlia tubers.

For the past several years we have grown all of our dahlias by leaving them in the pots and planting the pot directly in the ground. Our garden usually contains about 400 dahlia plants. I believe we have had the very same number and quality of blooms and there are at least three advantages over dahlias planted directly into the garden soil. First, you will avoid any damage from burrowing moles and voles. They seldom chew through the pots. Second, if the particular variety of dahlia is a poor tuber maker, you will find that they do make tubers if planted while still in the pot. Third, in the fall when the plants die back due to frost, those left in pots are easily pulled from



the ground and are very easy to store. That way you can avoid all of the digging and mess associated with washing and storing clumps of tubers. If you chose not to dig and store, simply cover with 4” to 6” of mulch and the dahlias will survive winter and grow again next season.

One last warning- until your plant’s stalk has grown to the width of a good sized pencil; you should inspect your newly immersing sprouts and plants daily, if possible. At this stage new tender growth is very inviting to cutworms (photo on right). They come out at night and you might find that new growth has been cut off at the surface. Your plant will look like it has been visited by a “tiny lumberjack”.



If you find that a plant has been damaged or worse, search an inch or so down in the soil immediately around the damaged growth and you will probably find a fat, brown and round cutworm. Cutworms are hard to spot so take your time. Two stout rocks, used as cymbals, will take care of your lowly nemesis; ditto for an old pair of pliers. Some growers have been known to wrap aluminum foil around the lower couple of inches of new growth as a preventative cover. It works for dahlias and tomatoes; yet another similarity. Now, all the waiting is over. Begin planting your dahlias, get your hands dirty and your back, sore. Rejoice that your passion is gardening.

## JUNE- GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

You now have your dahlias in the ground and you want to do everything possible to help them establish a strong root system and leaf structure. Just like a lot of other flowering plants and vegetables, dahlias must be as healthy as possible and prepared to withstand the extreme heat of August and early September. The last two summers were extra challenges because of the additional “hammer” of drought. Dahlias are also comparable to corn in that they are heavy feeders, heavy drinkers, and benefit from the pulling up of soil (hilling) around the main stalk. A generous handful of a balanced fertilizer, like 8-8-8 or 12-12-12, placed around the base of the plant and then hilled up to the stalk will provide adequate food. We will discuss other fertilizers later. It is better to water dahlias at the base of the plants than by using an overhead sprinkling. Remove the lower sets of leaves to see where the water is going. Dahlias will also benefit from a generous layer of mulch to help retain water and cool the soil. Wheat straw, pine straw, dampened newspaper, aged manures, all are good mulches to use. These mulches also help fight weeds which, if left unchecked (unpulled), can rob dahlias of vital food and water. 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. Conditions like bone dry gardens and sunny days with highs near 90 degrees quickly stress the plants. The plants 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. Water deeply those plants that show signs of wilt. A rule of thumb for established dahlia plants is they want 1” of water a week. 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.

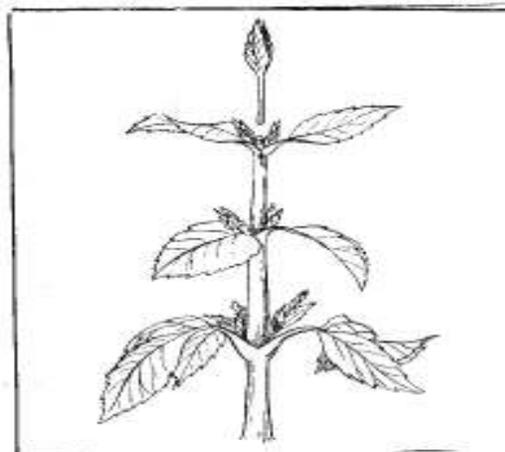
### Develop good cultivation habits

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 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. \*\*

### 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. **Cont on p-6**

## STONE MT DISPLAY GARDEN PLANTED

This past Saturday 12 members gathered at the Plantation at Stone Mountain Park and went to work tilling, writing tuber names on tags, laying out the garden and then planting about 160 tubers of all sizes, colors and forms . The stakes were also placed next to the tubers so it won't be long before we will start tying the plants as they grow.

Thanks to Larry Bloomer & Kathy Keyes, Dave & Cheri Felton, Heather & Maddy Varsolona, Bob & Lori Goehring, Valerie Stewart, Frank McComb, Gene Hutchison and John Kreiner. We really appreciate your help in getting the display garden going for 2009. Look for an email as to when we will start our weekly garden maintenance visits and come and join us if you can.



LEFT TO RIGHT: KATHY KEYES, DAVE FELTON, LORIE GOEHRING, AND CHERI FELTON.



LEFT TO RIGHT: FRANK MCCOMB, DAVE FELTON, AND GENE HUTCHISON GETTING THE GARDEN READY TO PLANT



LEFT TO RIGHT: HEATHER VARSALONA, VALERIE STEWART, DAVE FELTON, GENE HUTCHISON, AND MADDY VARSALONA.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO MADDY VARSALONA

Congratulations are in order to Maddy Varsalona on her recent appearance in early May on the Gardening in Georgia TV show with Walter Reeves. The youngest member of the Dahlia Society of Georgia did herself well in showing Walter around her dahlias in the yard of their family home in Kennesaw. Hopefully we can see a tape of her appearance during one of our meetings.

BEST SEEDLING IN 2008 GA SHOW FROM BRIAN KILLINGSWORTH



2008 SEEDLING FROM JOHN KREINER



**Aphids** 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



Slugs love lettuce and other tender greens.

all slugs, but by keeping you garden clean and free of debris will eliminate many places where they hide. Beer traps are known to entice and drown slugs. **Ground beetles** (right) dine on slugs so be kind to them. Commercial slug

bait is available but can be dangerous to pets.

Small webs covering coppery colored, lower leaves that curl, dry up and turn yellow are often times a sign of **spider mite** (below) damage; particularly in hot and dry weather. A suspected leaf can be shaken



Telltale yellowing and webs are easier to see.

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** (left) have arrived.



These BB (as in BB gun) sized black varmints can be controlled with Sevin **but** remember Sevin is a contact killer and will need to be applied often. Since their damage is usually minor and they will disappear by early July, I recommend you accept

them for the time being; because Sevin kills all insects, including good ones. Check the tops of your plants in early morning or late evening. You'll find flea beetles gathered, as if having coffee. I just squish the whole group with my fingers.

**Take care of yourself** 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 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, based on a simple furniture dolly, gives me shade while working on individual plants as well as saving me



trips to find tools or other needed devices. 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. (BELOW: LOUIE MEGGOS A-ID-W 2009)**

