The JUDGE's Corner

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Virus

I need again to start with a quick note on the virus projects. Our friend, colleague, and benefactor, Mr. Jim Chuey is again going to provide the financial support to let the ADS take on another aggressive set of analyses this summer. Thank you, Jim!

There will be a lot more information available in the June Bulletin and on the ADS website for these programs. The one that will affect us most is free testing of plants that come from G1 tubers(!). That will include the plants that Mike and Doc grew from G1 tuber cuttings. To be eligible for free testing, the 2017 plants will need to be traceable back to the clean plants in 2016. The name of the person who submitted the plant in 2016, the name of the cultivar, and the 2016 sample number will be required.

I recently had the opportunity to chat with an ADS member who sent a set of 12 leaf samples to Prof. Pappu for virus analysis. His was one of two sets of samples where no virus was detected in any of the samples submitted. In the second clean garden, only 5 samples were submitted. I asked him about his strategy for minimizing or eliminating virus in his garden. His answer was music to my ears: "I pull out any plant that shows any sign of virus. I probably throw out some plants that don't have virus; but I do not want to risk leaving a plant with virus in my garden." My friends, "If in doubt, pull it out!"

Color!

The "riot of color" that develops in our dahlia gardens by mid-summer and lasts through Fall is one of the nicest attributes of our dahlias. It is that 'riot of color' that first strikes you when you walk into a dahlia show in the morning after a night of staging. It is that 'riot of color' that will bring the public over to the show tables, many starting with the question "Are those things real!?" In short, the colors displayed in our dahlias and our dahlia gardens are one of their most important attributes.

Sorting out the relative merits of those colors will be one of the most important pieces of the judging process you will encounter at the show. I know that you all know where to begin the process of knowing

how to assess those merits: the ADS "Guide to Judging Dahlias" (GJD). Pages 9 to 16 cover the basics, but there are lots of additional references to color throughout the manual.

There is also a lot of important information on color in the "Classification and Handbook of Dahlias" (CHD). In particular , the CHD is the only place where you will find instructions on how to classify color on open-centered cultivars like our Blossom Gulch seedlings. The characterization of those colors can get complicated. Page 6 of the 2017 CHD is the place to look for the answer.

Perhaps the easiest way to see a quick summary of color attributes is on the backs of the seedling score sheets. (You can find a miniature version of the score sheets in the back of the CHD.) The back with the table of attributes provides a list of desirable and undesirable traits. The lists can serve as a handy reminder of the characteristics you need to think about when you are standing at a show table.

Color Quality

One of the first characteristics of color that is discussed in the GJD is the presence of gray in the florets. For me, that is one of the more difficult faults to identify. Last year, however, I had a seedling that was gray! It is pictured on the right with the white page out of the ADS color chart. The picture looks a little pink or purple here—but, as far as I could tell at the time, it was just plain gray. I was tempted to keep it as an example of a color fault. I concluded, however, that it was sufficient to keep the WH0 orchette on the right as a good example of color quality. The color of the sheet on which the color chips are presented was recently added as a 'color chip' as WH0. It is a very bright white.

The presence of gray mixed in with another color is harder to see. It may cause "a dirty color quality" (GJD, p. 11). The color charts of the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) included color chips that added gray (black) to most colors. My Earl Miner, BB FD P, on the right actually best matched an RHS chip that was dark red plus gray/ black. The picture on the right does not capture the color particularly well, but, at its best, the color would not have been characterized as 'bright' and 'clear.' The point is that when you are looking at an entry in the Trial Garden, for example, or comparing entries on the show table, you need to think in terms of a scale that runs between dull and bright or gray and clean. Then you need to decide where your entries fall on that scale. An entry that is bright and clear deserves a significantly higher rating than one that leans toward the dull and gray end of the scale.

The foregoing comments relate to the quality of the basic 'self-colored' or solid colored dahlia. Of course, it is not sufficient just to characterize the fundamental quality of the color. The typical color faults can be easier to find, but you should not lose sight of the importance of evaluation of the basic quality of the color.

Color Faults

The GJD lists a number of color "imperfections" on self-colored dahlias (GJD, p.11). "Conspicuous green bracts at the base of a ray floret" and "individual ray florets of a color different from other florets" are among the examples cited. "Judges must score down these and other genetic characteristics." On the show bench these faults are one consideration among a lot of characteristics. The GJD argues, however, that in the evaluation of seedlings with a tendency for conspicuous bracts or wolf petals, the faults should be penalized more severely since it is a genetic characteristic that will persist in future generations of the cultivar.

The other faults discussed on self-colored dahlias relate to the uniformity of the distribution of color. The color "should be evenly distributed without a blotchy, streaked, veined, or granular appearance at approximately arm's length." Ron