

The JUDGE's Corner

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One of the things growing in my yard and, I hope, in most of yours is a seedling patch. Perhaps the basic enjoyment of a seedling patch is the opportunity to see the first blooms of a new cultivar. A new creation, right in your own back yard, is something very special! It really doesn't even matter whether or not that new cultivar would win first prize at a show. It is a thrill to see that very first bloom regardless.

On the other hand, if it looks like it could win first prize at a show, it can be a lot of fun to begin the process of creating your own, named and official, ADS dahlia! The procedure begins by saving the tubers of the seedlings that you think have a chance of producing winners and growing them the following year. Knowing the characteristics of winning dahlias as you have learned through judging plays a big part in making good seedling choices.

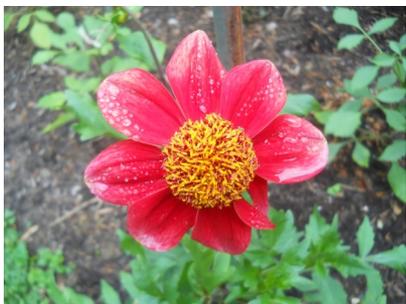
I'm convinced that I learned more about the judging manual by studying my seedlings than by anything else (with the possible exception of writing a column on judging! :-)). My counsel, therefore, is to take a score-sheet, a clipboard, and the *Guide to Judging Dahlias* (GJD) with you to the seedling patch regularly this summer. Try it; you'll keep better seedlings and (maybe) be better able to put good, but not great, seedlings on the compost pile at the end of the season.

A Battle of AN Seedlings

The seedling (A), below left, has good to excellent Form. The ray florets are nearly planar and therefore conform very well to the expectation in the ideal definition that they are "visible from the face of the bloom." (*Classification and Handbook of Dahlias*, (CHD), p. 5) The dome is similarly very consistent with the ideal definition. It is well

developed and consists of tubular florets that are "uniform in shape, size, and formation." (CHD, p. 5). That, of course, is the good news.

What do you think about the color? The color on the outer portion of the ray florets looks a little like a faded version of the color on the base of the ray florets. Unfortunately



they have that appearance as soon as they appear, so growing in a shadier part of the garden won't help. Can we make it a Blend? That might save it! Remember, however, that blends can only come from different color classes. That is, RD11 combined with RD4, approximately the case here, does not constitute a Blend! The bottom line is that we have red ray florets that are simply not very uniform from base to tip. Uniform color in self-colored (single color) dahlias is a basic requirement (GJD), p. 11)



Consider now the colors on the ray florets in the second seedling (B), on the right. What is the color of these ray florets? The answer is a little more complicated than you might think. Is it a Bicolor or a Blend? “The ideal bicolor will have consistent, uniform tips...with little bleeding. If a variety doesn't possess this distinctness, judges should classify it as a Blend.” Further, the length of the tip color should be 1/4 to 1/6 of the length of the ray floret. (GJD, p. 13) Blends only require “two or more evenly merging colors.” However, Flame Blends should have “a definite color break at greater than one-quarter of the length of the ray floret.” (GJD, p. 13) The choice basically boils down to the distinctness of the color break. I would go with a Bicolor in this case; but it could be argued either way.

The dilemma on this seedling is that while the color is very good either as a Bicolor or as a Blend, check out the Form. Do those outer disc florets look tubular to you? No, they clearly are not tubular. Further, the ray florets are less “...visible from the face of the bloom...,” (CHD, p. 5) compared to those in Seedling A. Now, how can I just put the color from B onto A or the Form from A onto B? Sounds like a good hand pollinating job, eh?! (Probably not!)

Which is the better seedling? In this case, I view the Color faults in seedling A to be of greater severity than the Form faults in seedling B. The former is headed to the compost pile at the end of the year. The matter regarding B may get another chance next year.

Virus

One way to tell that I've made some progress on the virus front is that I have had enough replacement plants this year! I will, no doubt,

lose a few more. It sure seems like I've had more than my share of rotted tubers this spring. I've also pulled a number of plants that seemed to have virus; but most of those were ones I purchased (bummer) over the winter. I'm very much looking forward to a larger crop of G1 tubers next spring!

See you at the shows! *Ron*