

The JUDGE's Corner

Ron Miner - baronminer@aol.com

Hooray; the season is underway! I hope you and your gardens are off to a good start. It seems like it is forever between getting our tubers started in pots and being able to get them in the ground. Then it seems to take about two months before the season is ending. Oh well, we have a lot of fun in between, don't we!

Keep some extra plants in pots so that you can remove any plants that start to show virus symptoms. I ended up with a lot of holes in my garden last summer. Removing unhealthy plants helps to protect your healthy plants.

Big Picture

It is important not to lose sight of the basics of judging dahlias. Thorough knowledge of the judging manual and practical experience of judging with a team in a show or at a Trial Garden are the yin and the yang of judging. While you are judging with a team in a show, "..... the judge has the opportunity to garner insights that will significantly augment book knowledge." (Guide to Judging Dahlias (GJD), p. 4) Neither that "book knowledge" nor extensive practical experience are sufficient by themselves. Both are required.

You will find that the process of completing the judges' tests is a good way to improve your knowledge of the GJD. (Writing a column on judging is a pretty good tool, too. :-)) I have found that writing out the answers to that test requires a pretty thorough review of all our judging materials; not only the GJD, but also the Classification and Handbook of Dahlias (CHD) and the Score sheets. That "book knowledge" is largely accomplished on your own. Judging with a team requires effective interaction with your teammates.

Have you ever participated in a team building exercise? One of the important lessons from that experience is that the conclusions or the outcome of the team exercise is



Judging Team at Petitti Seminar '15

almost always better than any of the individual results even if some on the team are much more expert than some of the others. That bottom line does depend on one thing; that is effective communication within the team. Effective communication means that you, as a participant, are prepared not only to contribute to the discussion but also to listen to what your colleagues have to say. That interaction within the team is the basis for the learning experience described in the GJD. Corollaries to listening and respecting the inputs of your team members are 1) encouraging the inputs of those more shy and retiring members of your team and 2) questioning the “pronouncements” of the overbearing members of the team. Base your questions and comments on your understanding of the GJD. Everyone will benefit from your inputs. Once a decision is reached, remember that it is a team decision; you need to adopt it and be able to explain it in the context of judging criteria, not an individual’s perspective.

One more big picture item needs to be addressed; our prejudice. We all have favorite colors or forms or; you need to recognize those prejudices and make sure they don’t influence your decisions on judging. Judging seedlings requires a very detailed assessment of a whole series of specific criteria. One of the reasons that adherence to that regimen is so important is that it helps guide us around our prejudices. I remember judging with a long since retired DSO Senior Judge who led our team to pick an entry for a first because she “liked it best,” even though she wasn’t sure why. Today, I think I would have the courage to ask her to try to figure out why she liked it best. It was probably the best entry; but she should have been prepared to tell the team why that was her choice. You should be prepared to tell the team why you prefer one entry over the others. Your “like” needs to be based on specific judging criteria. The logical extension of this principle is that you should never judge a class that includes one of your entries and/or one of your introductions. Chances are you will “like” it best!

Some of you might wonder where to find “6 qualifications of a good judge.” The basis for answering that question and the context for most of the foregoing discussion can be found on and around page 6 in the Guide to Judging Dahlias.

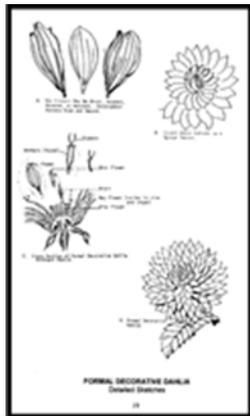
Classification

The classification of a cultivar is an important consideration in virtually all judging scenarios. The extent to which an entry conforms

to the ideal definition of the form class in which it is entered is one of the considerations in evaluating the entry against its competitors. What is the level of importance of that consideration in judging a fully double class? I hope that your answer to that question is based on our score sheet and the distribution of Form considerations on p. 40 of the GJD. It says there that 5 of the 28 points for Form are assigned to “True Form.” That is, the ‘level of importance’ answer is 5%.

If an exhibitor brings an unknown cultivar to a show or if you are going to be judging seedlings, the first step in the process is classifying the entry. “The arrangement and the shape of individual florets become the focal point when Senior Judges determine the classification for all unclassified dahlias shown in ADS shows.” (GJD, p. 16)

The figure at the upper right is scanned from p. 19 of the GJD. It shows the shape and the arrangement of the ray florets in a Formal Decorative dahlia. In this case, the definitions in the GJD and CHD are the same. The ray florets are generally broad, flat and smooth. Their arrangement is uniform and regular. Do the sketches look a little different than you ordinarily think of as formal decorative? How would you classify the cultivars on the right? The ray florets on the blooms are increasingly involute from the top bloom to the bottom bloom, particularly near the center, right? What location on the bloom should you examine in order to determine the shape of the ray florets? The answer is important in the cases of the blooms on the right. I hope you said ‘the equator.’ (GJD, p. 25) (Also check the



paragraph at the bottom of p. 25. It specifically addresses the involute ray florets in discussion here.) Each of the blooms on the right is classified as Formal Decorative. They are Ova Jo, JS Neon Purple, and Clearview Butterscotch, top to bottom. In my view, Ova Jo comes closest to the top of that FD “Form Mountain” from the point of view of the shape of the ray florets, but they all are good FD dahlias.

Judging Challenge

Last month, I asked you to take a look at the elements of Form summarized for fully double blooms on page 17 and 18 in the GJD. Can you cite those five elements off the top of your head? Inasmuch as Form is such an important aspect in judging, you should be able to do that. Of course, you could also have a sticky note on that page in the GJD which will be in your apron while you are judging! They are Symmetry, Contour, Development, and True Form. (Aside: Didn't I just say five elements? Yes, I did. I had forgotten that Depth was not included in the listing on pages 17 and 18. The best places to find Depth/Size are on pages 36 and 40 in the GJD and on the Fully Double score sheet. I don't remember why we didn't include Depth on p. 18. In hindsight, I think it should be there. Up until about the time the new GJD was issued, Size Proportion was a separate item on the score sheet. That could be the reason it was left off p. 18.) The fifth element of Form is Depth or Size Proportion. Thus, when you are looking at a set of entries in a fully double class on the show table, you should walk through a check list in the back of you mind: Is there any asymmetry in the bloom? Is the build or contour of the bloom uniform and regular? Is the bloom at its peak of development? How high up that Form Mountain does this entry stand? Is the depth of the bloom sufficient for its classification? Color and the other attributes should follow, but Form should be the starting point.

The other part of the question from last month was which of the Form elements are relevant to open-centered cultivars? Frankly, there isn't a lot of guidance on this question in the GJD.



Depth is obviously irrelevant. Contour is probably best considered in the context of Symmetry since “build” implies three dimensions. We are left with Symmetry, Development, and True Form; and, if you are judging in a Trial Garden, Development drops out of the list. Perhaps the key “take away” from this part of the discussion is that when you are judging a class of open-centered cultivars, symmetry and the elevation of the entries on their Form Mountain are very important parts of the evaluation of Form.

Classification Challenge

The Classification Challenge for this month was Rae Ann Logaugh’s Evie Gullikson Medal winner, Destiny’s Teachers. You all, no doubt, said that it was a variegated orchid. The challenge, however, was in actually capturing the classification in writing. I recommend going back to the CHD and reading the instructions on the open-centered cultivars because it will not be intuitive for us (at least me) for a while. At the bottom of p. 6, Lou tells us that the classification for orchids is



based on the color of the reverse of the ray florets. In this case, they are variegated with white as the dominant color. The color thus begins with V WH/PR. Next comes the color on the face of the ray florets; they are also variegated dominated by white. The classification, including the color chips, is O V WH1/PR28 / v ww1/pr28.

Did you identify any Form or Color faults? In the context of our foregoing discussion on the importance of Symmetry, look at the distribution of the ray florets around the center of the bloom. Seven of the gaps are pretty much the same. Do you agree? The gap to the right of the 6 o’clock floret, however, is

bigger. The overlap on the involute ray florets is pretty uniform, although the lack of a difference in color between the reverse and the front of the ray florets masks any difference. There is some difference in the shapes of the tips of the ray florets. The ones at 7 o'clock and noon are less sharp than the others. Do you give it a passing score for symmetry? I would. Since this bloom is in the Trial Garden, the only other Form issue is True Form. The ideal definition calls for "ray florets involute for two-thirds or more of their length and fully involute for at least one-third of their length." The bloom meets the definition very well. The bottom line for form would probably be between 85 and 90%. That would correspond to a penalty of 3.5 or 4 points for Form on the score sheet.

Variegated dahlias should have a sharply contrasting second color that is uniformly distributed over the bloom. (GJD, p. 14) The only obvious color fault I see is on the ray floret at 9 o'clock. It shows a purple streak that is much larger than any of the other variegations on the bloom. The problem at the tip of the ray floret at 7 o'clock is probably a bruise that would not mean much in the Trial Garden setting. In that case, the color rating would be very good, perhaps 90% with a penalty of 2 points.

I will give you a 'pass' on assignments until fall. :-)

Judging Experience

Exhibit and judge in as many shows as you can this summer. I would particularly recommend participating in the National Show in Asheville, NC, on Sept. 15 to 18. It promises to be a great show with lots of opportunities to meet the best dahlia growers and exhibitors and judges in the world. They are nice people who are happy to share their knowledge with you!

Ron