

## The JUDGE's Corner

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In looking back at some of my columns from last year, I've come away a little concerned that I zeroed in on some mighty fine details that might have been a bit more detailed than appropriate. It is clear, I hope, that some of our excellent 3rd year seedlings from Blossom Gulch will require that level of detail. On the other hand, it is very important that we don't lose sight of some of the basics on the judging scene!

Let's take a giant step back from the numerical evaluation of seedling entries and think about the basics of judging in a show. Let's assume, for the moment, that each class is exhibited by itself. In that situation, we are basically able just to compare the attributes of each of the entries to one another. We do not need to be concerned, for example, that the entries would have different ideal forms. In principle, that makes the judging easier than the judging where some classes are combined.

What would you do, for example, if the three flowers on the right comprised your class 2210 (B SC LB) in a show? Your first reaction might be that you will have a difficult time in picking a winner among three nice entries! Of course, that is a good problem to have.



Your second reaction should be that you need to do a close examination of each of the entries to see if they have any shortcomings among the key attributes that we use in judging dahlias. Would you start with Bloom Position and work your way up to Form and Color? I hope you are all saying "no way" in answer to that one! You need to look at all of the attributes for each of the entries, but the highest priorities among those attributes are Form and Color. Remember that the other attributes are all together sometimes referred to as "the Other Half." They are important, but not nearly as important as Form and Color.

If we assume that the pictures are sufficient to be able to

judge the class, what would you conclude? The only basic difference I see is in the distribution of the second color in the blend. The bloom on the lower right appears to have more yellow at 10 o'clock than at 4 o'clock. I don't think I can figure out the first and second place entries; but I think it is pretty clear that the bloom on the lower right gets the third spot.

Let's pretend that the two blooms on the right here represent the two best entries in your class 3001 (BB FD W). Assuming again (incorrectly) that you can draw conclusions on the basis of a picture, what comparisons would you draw and what conclusions would you reach? It is clear that there is one important Form attribute that is better in the upper bloom than the lower bloom. What is it? There are five key elements of Form: Symmetry, Contour, Development, True Form, and Depth (GJD, p. 40). I agree with you if you said Symmetry differs between the two blooms. The lower bloom seems to be longer in the 2 o'clock to 8 o'clock direction than in the 11 o'clock to 5 o'clock direction. The center seems also to show that same asymmetry. We would conclude, therefore, that the upper bloom gets the first place ribbon and the lower bloom gets the second.



The two blooms below right could be the entries in your MB V class (the number for which is ???). The first thing I would want to do is look more carefully at the center of the bloom on the left. It looks a little ragged from here. Let's say it is. The bloom on the right has some pretty clear color uniformity issues, doesn't it! A substantial Form issue on the left vs. a substantial color issue on the right add up to a dilemma! Now is when you start searching for weaknesses and strengths in the "Other Half." You need always to check all the



attributes. In this case it seems likely that differences in those attributes will drive the determination of the first and second for these two entries.

Perhaps you will be assigned to judge our newest class of dahlias, the Orchettes. Your class 9401 could include the four cultivars on the right. Which of the entries can you remove from the competition first? You might think that the third one has so much red on it that it can be set back first; but that is not the case. The classification is based on the color on the reverse of the ray florets and they all meet that criterion. The second cultivar down, on the other hand, is a seedling headed for the compost. Why? It is highly asymmetrical. Look at the ray florets at 2 and 8 o'clock. The one at 2 is not fully involute anywhere along its length. It should be fully involute for at least one-third of its length (GJD, p.5). The one (sort of) opposite, at 8, is more involute but is also displaced down from the center of the bloom. In fact, each of the ray florets is different and there are varying gaps between them. With that one set back, the competition gets tougher among the other three.

Are you ready to move to the "Other Half?" I don't think so. The bloom at the top has gaps at 3, 5, and 8 o'clock and an "unruly" petaloid at 1:30. The 3rd bloom down has short petaloids. They should be 1/2 to 2/3 the length of the ray floret according to the GJD, p. 5. The ray florets also look longer toward 1 or 2 o'clock than toward 6 or 7 o'clock. The bloom at the bottom has relatively subtle gaps at 6 and 9 o'clock.

The color of the bottom bloom is pure white, plain and simple. The red on the face of the 3rd bloom is streaked. The ray florets at the center of the top bloom are yellow. If that center color were green, it



would be a net negative. The yellow is not a problem as long as it is uniform.

As I see it, those observations add up to slightly favor the bloom at the bottom. Now you can go take a look at the other attributes. If there are any serious problems with Substance, Stem, Foliage, or Bloom Position, they could swing the choice away from number 4 either to number 1 or 3 (but not 2). That bloom number 4 is actually Verrone's Morning Star, the 2013 Stanley Johnson Award winner and the 9401 cultivar "to beat."

The values of the various attributes in judging seedlings provide a sense of their priorities. They are as follows: Color, 22; Form, 28; Substance, 15; Stem, 10; Foliage, 10; Bloom Position, 5; and Distinction, 5. Remember to start with Form and Color but do not ignore the others. In close calls, your general impression from, say, 6' or 8' should help determine the winner.

OK, back to the big picture. In order to judge dahlias, you need to grow and to show them. You need to step back and refrain from any comments when your team is judging a class in which you have an entry. The best strategy is just to walk away from the table while the class is judged. You need to know the local rules for the show you're judging and you need to pay attention to them and the instructions provided by the show and the judging chairpersons. You need to get a sense of the quality of the show by walking through it, including, in particular, the classes assigned to your team.

Once you are on a judging team, you need to listen to and respect your colleagues' comments. At the same time, you need to volunteer your observations and comments, particularly if they run contrary to the general thinking and particularly if others on your team already have their minds made up. Of course, it is best if your observations and conclusions have a basis in the GJD. On the other hand, if you are that team leader, you need to solicit opinions and observations from less experienced judges on your team—and you need to avoid reaching conclusions without everyone's inputs!

For the 2015 seedling challenge, we will go two directions: one based on Fully Double seed parents and one based on Open-Centered seed parents. You will have the opportunity to get the seeds at an upcoming meeting. More on that later!

*Ron*