

The JUDGE's Corner

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There is an important footnote to add to my “vacation” column last month. That is that, with the support of the Sheetz-Chuey Foundation, you and every ADS member will be receiving a pocket-sized brochure with the June issue of the ADS Bulletin. That brochure will provide some pictures of foliage of dahlias that have virus as well as some commentary on what to do if you have plants with similar foliage. (It boils down to “If in doubt, throw it out!”) While the primary use of that brochure will be in your own garden, you should also bring it along to our shows. I plan to ask you to use it when you are judging! We will be penalizing entries with foliage exhibiting virus (check p. 28 in the judging manual and bear in mind that we won't need to worry about confusion with nutrient deficiencies!). Thanks, Jim, for your ongoing support!

Ok, back to the big picture for judging dahlias. Our most common judging experience is show judging. Let's say that you've brought a few blooms (or better yet, a ton of blooms) to the show and have not really finished staging when the show chair or the judging chair says it's time to get to work. You grab your Show Schedule, your Classification and Handbook of Dahlias, and your new virus brochure and head over to the judges' meeting. If the meeting looks like the one below, you're probably in the Pacific Northwest. This picture covers about half the judges at the meeting at the 2012 National show. Big or small, the next steps are basically the same—a discussion with the team and a walk through the



'sort of' worked! Fortunately, virtually all teams now discuss their observations and conclusions. Those observations and the opinions expressed in those discussions should, of course, be based on the Judging Manual. In that way, all the team members benefit from the discussion. If you are the team leader, you will need to encourage the less experienced judges to contribute to the conversation. If you are the least experienced judge on the team, you still need to be comfortable in making comments on your observations. Remember, though, those comments should be based on your perception of the contents of the judging manual.

As a member of the team, you need to listen to and respect the perspectives of the other members of the team. Do you remember Glenn Ruth telling us to have a good time and learn something?

That is still excellent advice! Another important issue is that you need to adopt and "own" the team conclusion. When discussing the results with the exhibitor you need to say something to the effect that 'we considered that point, but concluded the color issues lead us to choose the other bloom.' You should not say 'I agree with you; but you know how Joe is about form.' The decisions are team decisions. Pages 5 and 6 in the judging manual discuss the team approach

The other starting point for the judging process is developing an overview of the entries in your section. Perhaps the most important step in that process is making sure that everything in your section belongs in your section. You need to move entries that are misplaced as early in the process as possible so that they are included in the judging in the section where it belongs.

It is also important to have a sense of the general quality of the entries at the show. The quality of the Novice classes at the Cuyahoga Fair will be different from the quality of the Open B classes at the National. That does not mean that you should not



Glenn and Jerry at the Cuyahoga Fair Show in 2007

should probably use special entry tags for the Novice sections so we can provide feedback on the basis for our conclusions. Be sure to write a short note on the current entry tags to help exhibitor understand what might be a confusing choice to them.



*Five wonderful (Yellow FD!)
Edna Cs at the 2014 National
show (Steve Santose)*

I have so far left unsaid one of the most basic requirements in judging; that is maintaining a fair and unprejudiced mindset in the judging process. I am very confident that we all do our best to honor that requirement. There are, however, some subtle issues you should keep in mind. One is your own preferences for form and color. Barbara will tell you that, for me, all colors are equal; except that yellow is the best. When I am judging at the head table, I need sometimes to remind myself that the best entry might actually not be yellow!

Similarly, we all probably prefer (FD for me!) one of the fully double forms over the others. You need to be sure to keep in mind that each of our forms are of equal merit and that each of the colors in our ADS color chart are of equal merit.

Another area of potential prejudice to keep in mind is that you may not really want to know the name of the exhibitor when you are in the process of judging the show. Therefore, keep that in mind when you are staging your entries. We are all occasionally ‘blown away’ by a bucket full of blooms that Randy and Kathy or Jim and Harriet or Tony and Jackie ... or others of our friends and colleagues ... are hauling into the staging area. My counsel is to try to avoid associating specific blooms with specific exhibitors. You won’t want to be aware of that bit of information when you get out on the show table later in the morning!

In our local shows, it is almost impossible to avoid judging sections where you have entries in some of the classes. Obviously, you don’t want to judge the class that includes your entry; but what should you do? The best strategy would be to just quietly step back from the rest of the team while they judge the class. That, however, is usually difficult, particularly if two of the judges on the team

have entries in the class. It is probably best to let the chairman of the team know that you need to step out of the judging of the class, then step away from the table entirely. It is best to avoid watching over the shoulders of the rest of the judging team. It is also important that you avoid doing anything that would identify your entry from the rest. You might need to step out again when the section winner is chosen!

The interactions among your team members need to be positive and respectful. The Senior Judges on the team need to help the Accredited Judges and, particularly, the Candidate Judges understand their comments and their reasoning. Comments and questions from even from the newest of the Candidate Judges should be treated with respect and used as a teaching moment—for both the Candidate and the team! The team does need to balance those teaching moments with the need to get the job accomplished in a reasonable time frame. That translates to avoiding agonizing over decisions, particularly if those decisions involve resolving the 2nd and 3rd place entries. In very close calls between entries of very similar quality, standing back 6' or 8' and determining the best overall appearance of the entries will usually lead to the best decision.

If you haven't completed the planning of your garden, I encourage you to dedicate some space to building stock of your best of your Blossom Gulch seedlings. Next spring (2016) you will be able to enter those cultivars in the ADS Trial Gardens for evaluation. I recommend sending them (3 tubers each) to at least five of the Trial Gardens in order to provide the best opportunity to win a Medal for your entry. We average the best three scores among the Trial Gardens for each entry to determine the highest average score to win, in the case of the Blossom Gulch seedlings, the Evie Gullikson Medal. I hope we will have huge classes of those BG seedlings up for Seedling Bench Evaluation at the 2016 shows. We will probably use that process for the Judging Seminar at the 2016 Petitti show.

For the 2015 Judging Seminar at Petitti's, we will go back to determining the best and the worst seedlings from the seeds that will be distributed at the May meeting. We will evaluate seedlings both from Fully Double and Open-Centered parents.

Ron