

The JUDGE's Corner

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Color!

Barbara has made a number of wall hangings that feature dahlias. This one is hanging on our kitchen door. A couple others like this one will become a feature of the boutique that will happen at our 2018 Midwest Show. (You may want to get one for your kitchen door! They come with a guarantee for a smile when you look at them.) I think the wall hangings are strikingly beautiful as a result of the “riot of color” I mentioned in last month’s column.

Last month I talked about the quality of color in self-colored dahlias. Clear, bright, sparkling, and lustrous colors are a key element of the attractiveness of dahlias both to us growers and to those amazed bystanders at a show who want to touch them to see if they are real. Assessing the quality of color is also a key part of our job as judges. The presence of gray in the color and any lack in the uniformity of the distribution of the color are key issues there. Fading and streaking are important faults to monitor.

Color combinations contribute significantly to the beauty of our favorite flower and they add a level of complexity to our judging process. The distribution of the two or more colors must now be uniform on the ray florets. That added requirement can make it a little more difficult for a multi-colored dahlia to beat a ‘self-colored’ dahlia as they compete for a higher award.



Color Combinations

The Classification and Handbook of Dahlias (CHD) lists five different classes of dahlias with more than one color: Light Blends, Dark Blends, Flame Blends, Variegated, and Bicolors. Each has its own unique set of requirements for their colors. In addition, we have lots of color options on the open-centered cultivars: petaloids, differing face and reverse colors on Orchids and Orchettes, domes on Anemones, and eye zones on Singles and Mignon Singles. We have generated lots of practical experience on the open-centered cultivars since we started growing the Blossom Gulch seedlings! (Thanks, again, Kathy!)

Blushes and Blends

When is a blend not a blend? It is not a blend when it is a blush. Distinguishing between the two can be problematic if you are seeing the cultivar for the first time. “A light, uniformly tinged coloration of florets represents a blush.” (GJD, p.12) The manual suggests that one key to a blush is that it can vary from one part of the season to another or from one part of the country to another. “Leniency should be the rule ... since the blush ... can vary substantially.” (GJD, p.12) The blush, above is one of my personal favorites since I was the first person to see it.

(:-) It is Baron Dalton.

“In blends, two or more evenly merging harmonious or pleasingly contrasting colors should be apparent.” (GJD, p.12) It is important that the two colors be different colors. That is, two different chip colors from the same color does not make a blend. The two colors also need to be apparent at arm’s length.

The example on the left certainly meets both of those last criteria. This one is Ritchie’s RAJ and the picture is from the 2016 Bonneyville Mills Trial Garden. They determined that the colors are WH1 and PR24. Does that make it a Light Blend or a Dark



Blend? What do you think, DSO judges? The starting point for that decision is to know that the GJD tells us that white “is not a factor in determining whether a variety is a light blend or a dark blend.” (GJD p.12) That is, you just ignore white. Next, you need to look in the CHD to see whether PR24 falls in the list of Light Blends or the list of Dark Blends. You can skip that step if you remember that all purples are in the Dark Blend list. Ok, that means it is a DB (BB C DB PR24/WH1).

The CHD provides a complete list of colors that fall in Dark Blends, Light Blends, and Flame Blends. In deciding between DB and LB, ignore white then check which list contains the second color. If you don’t have white as one of the colors, you need to determine which of the two colors is dominant in the bloom. Then you look up the dominant color in the CHD lists and assign it to the appropriate blend.

Flame Blends can be a little more tricky inasmuch as there can be an overlap with the other blends and you may need to make a judgment call as to whether the color will “simulate flames of fire by the merging of colors” (GJD, p.12) or not. In general, however, if the colors are listed in the Flame Blend list, the cultivar should be classified as a Flame Blend.

The key attributes of a blend are a uniform distribution of the two colors on the ray florets, a smooth or gradual transition from one of the colors to the other, and a pleasing combination of colors.

Frankly, I do not know how to judge that last criterion! Perhaps this is one of those areas where the ladies’ eyes are better than mine. My counsel, nevertheless, is to avoid penalizing an entry for a color combination that is not pleasing. As I see it, “pleasing,” like beauty, is largely in the eye of the beholder.



Bicolored Dahlias

Take another look at Barbara’s wall hanging. Does one of those dahlias leap out at you? My eye is drawn to the dark red bloom

with the white tips. “The ideal bicolor will have consistent, uniform tips or stripes of distinct contrasting color with little bleeding.” (GJD, p.13) Let’s take another look at the DB we just talked about. Some of you might have said that it looks more like a Bicolor than a Dark Blend. It is an appropriate comment! The question is the extent of the bleeding between the two colors. Examination of the tips of the ray florets (inset) shows that there is a tendency for a gradual transition from purple to white, rather than a sharp color break. That characteristic is the reason that it was classified as a Dark Blend rather than a Bicolor.

Stripes, like the seedling on the right, are the other kind of Bicolor. Here, too, a sharp break between the colors is required. In this case, a sharp break is apparent. There is little bleeding of the orange into the white. The amount of each color also affects the quality. “Bicolors slightly tipped with white or other contrasting colors should not rate as high as cultivars where the outer tip is one-quarter to one-sixth of the ray floret. The striped bicolor on the other hand, which extends the length of the ray floret should contrast from one color to the other by one-quarter to one-half the ... width.” (GJD, p.13)

The key color quality characteristics required for Bicolors are a uniform distribution of the second color around the bloom, a sharp transition from one color to the other and the correct balance between the two colors. (More on color next month!)



Dahlia Hygiene

Remember that there are critical cleanliness steps required to protect your tubers while you are getting ready to plant them. Sterilize your tools with a 10% solution of bleach in water. Do not move from one plant to the next without sterilizing the tools. If one of your plants has virus, you could spread it to many others.

Yellow sticky tape in your plant starting area can also help minimize transfer of virus by insects.

Ron