

The Elegant, Beguiling and Challenging Dahlia

The dahlia garden creates a symphony of color and design. A painter's pallet of color and texture with bright pink, purple, white, and orange blooms contrasting the browns and rusts of autumn leaves and plants – all shouting out one last hurrah of summer joy.



Hawaii Dahlia

HISTORY

This beautiful wonder has roots in the period of the ancient Aztec civilization, a native of Mesoamerica found within the borders of Mexico and adjacent countries of Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador & Costa Rica. Research has identified it as being first recorded in the The Badianus Manuscript, An Aztec Herbal of 1552. "The document contains what may be taken as the earliest illustration of a Dahlia that has thus far come down to us."

CULTURE

"Botanically the Genus Dahlia belongs to the family Compositae (Asteraceae), tribe Heliantheae, and was given the Genus name "GEORGINA" in error in 1803, a name by which it is still known in many eastern parts of Europe."

The dahlia's interest and beauty can be attributed to the variety of cultivars in color, size and form. From small as 2-inches (single) to as large as 12-inches (dinner plate) with over 50,000 cultivars in 795 species. "Dahlias are classified according to flower size, type, and color. The flower itself actually is a compound inflorescence known as a head, which contains both ray florets and disk florets. There are nine different classifications of size, fifteen of color, and twenty of size accounting for the 795 different classes."

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MGAGCM MISSION STATEMENT

The Master Gardener Association of Genesee County is organized exclusively for charitable, educational and scientific purposes, specifically to instruct adults and youth in horticulture science, to educate communities about environmentally sound practices through horticulture-based activities, to promote food security and to improve the esthetic of our community. This Chapter is organized and operated exclusively for charitable purposes and consistent with the purposes and mission of the Michigan Master Gardener Association, Inc. (MMGA)

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While the dahlias of Mexico may grow like weeds along their roads, here in Zone 5 they will not survive our harsh winters. Growing dahlias is not for the fainthearted gardener - they require much care in planting, maintaining and storing for the winter months. A popular plant in the early 1900's when it first arrived to our states it lost



Summer Dream Farm Photo Courtesy Kit Puroll

its interest when women entered the workforce and home gardens migrated

from a pleasant pastime to what was easiest to maintain - annuals filled this need and the dahlia along with many of our heritage plants became forgotten. In recent years as the baby-boomers have retired and entered a time in life where home gardening is back in vogue the dahlias are seeing a comeback. So much so, that Summer Dreams Farm in Ortonville, has become a major supplier of dahlia tubers and fresh cut dahlias. Michael Genovese began growing commercial Dahlias in 2015 planting 5500 tubers on his parents farm and within three years has established his Summer Dreams Farm with 6 acres dedicated to Dahlias - with over 550 varieties and more than 20,000 plantings.

PLANTING

Whether you are just deciding to grow dahlias for the first time or are a novice there is much to know and learn to be rewarded with beautiful blooms. It all begins with the tubers. While you can grow from seeds Michael shares; "For every 100 seeds you plant, you might get one or two flowers that are worth saving."

The tubers, one might think, look like the udders of a cow but are described as radiating out from the dahlia crown like the spokes of a wagon wheel. These tubers hold the energy for the plant and future blooms, a "modified stem structure that develops below ground and serves as a storage organ. The 'eyes' of a tuber are actually nodes."

When handling a crown with several tubers you will find that they are awkward and tubers may fall off. Be aware that all of the tubers are not required for a healthy plant to grow out of the clump of tubers; in fact we will talk about dividing a clump further along in the article. What is essential when planting tubers, is the eyes, or nodes mentioned above. The eyes are located where the tuber meets the stalk - the crown. Viable tubers have an eye originating from the crown portion, plus a neck connecting the crown to the body of the tuberous root. This connection is fragile and often an individual tuber will fall off of the crown. It is unlikely to grow due to leaving the eye behind on the stalk but is not of concern since there are so many other tubers on the crown - perhaps as many as ten.

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Deciding when and where to plant is the first step after your tuber purchase. A general rule of thumb when planting dahlias is to follow a planting guide as you would for your tomatoes. Dahlias should be planted in soil that is maintaining a temperature of more than 55 degrees. (Roughly after May 15th) Choose an area with good drainage and full sun and plant in soil rich in organic material and compost.

It is good practice to begin with a soil test first. Dahlias do “require nitrogen but too much can cause the plants to be poor flower producers. Dahlias perform best when planted in soil that contains around 220 lb of phosphorus per acre and 250 lb of potassium per acre. They should have a slightly acidic soil although dahlias can be grown in soil with a PH up to 7.5.” Watering is not necessary after the initial planting until the plant reaches between 6-8 inches. Dahlias are susceptible to rotting if over watered. When you have selected your area you can prepare your space with a depth between 2- 4 inches. If you have purchased your tuber you most likely will have an individual tuber which you will lie lengthwise with the eye up; however, if you are using last years tubers or have gotten some from a friend they will be in a clump connected to the stem. In this instance, if you are not dividing you will place the tuber mass in the space, splaying the tubers apart with the eyes up. If the eyes have not sprouted use last years stem as a point of reference. (Regardless the sprout from the eye will find its way to the light.) Space individual plants approximately 1-2 feet apart and if planting multiple rows stagger the plants.

It is an option to begin your tubers indoors however there seems to be some debate about the benefits of starting them early. If you choose this path you will want to begin your process in early April for planting mid-May. Swan Island Dahlia shares these instructions for starting indoors: “Potting soil or sand is recommended as a planting medium. Start your dahlias approx. 6 weeks before you transplant them out. Plant 2-3-inches deep. Keep in a warm area above 60 degrees. They will need water to get growing. Please make sure to keep your starting medium slightly damp – cool to the touch. (Do not soak them as dahlias can rot or develop poorly in too wet of conditions). Transplant your dahlias out in your beds after the danger of frost is past. The ground temperature should be approximately 60 degrees. Plants should be about 12” tall or less when you move them outdoors. If the plants are over 12” high, pinch them back before transplanting them out. Use a handful of bone meal in each hole, at the time you transplant.”



Photo Courtesy: Kit Puroll

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MAINTAINANCE

STAKING: Be aware that the dahlia plants have a very shallow root system and as they grow will become leggy. Planting in a protected space will help with windy conditions but it is recommended to stake your plants once they have reached a foot high, using garden stakes or tomato cages.

WATERING: At this point you should introduce a watering plan, if rainfall is less than one inch in seven days water to create a moist environment NOT soggy, Dahlia's **DO NOT LIKE WET FEET.** Avoid overhead watering if possible, wet foliage will be an invitation to disease. If you must use overhead watering do so early in the day so that it quickly dries from the foliage. Meanwhile, "when the soil temperature exceeds 95 degrees, water to cool the plant and soil. This avoids plant stress, which inhibits growing. Soil temperatures over 95 degree can be lethal to plant roots. As long as the plants re not blooming you might want to water the foliage also." A great resource for information on watering can be found at The American Dahlia Society; [ADS Dahlia University; Watering;](#)



Harvey Koop

GROOMING:

Pruning your Dahlias will reward you with more blooms. "Some Dahlia growers begin their grooming right when the main stem(s) come from the tuber eye (s), by allowing only one stem to remain. This forces all the energy to one main stem. Other growers allow multiple main stems if the tuber provides them. Grooming is best done in the morning or evening when the plants are crisp with moisture. It will be easier to break out unwanted parts of the plant, and the breaks will be cleaner. If unwanted parts of the plants do not break off easily you can use scissors or even your thumbnail to remove them, be sure to sterilize your tools between plants to avoid transferring any possible virus from plant to plant."

PESTS AND PROBLEMS

There are a variety of insects and disease that plague dahlias. As a first step maintain sanitation throughout the season removing dead leaves from around the plants. Keeping your plant healthy by proper watering and planting in the right location are also important first steps. With that said you should watch for insects including snails and slugs; earwigs and cucumber beetles, aphids, leafhoppers, spider mites, stalk borers and thrips. [Swan Island](#) describes four of these issues. You can visit their website for recommendations on treatments.

NAILS & SLUGS- "They will begin eating your dahlias before they even show through the ground. Slugs and snails will eat the new sprouts, holes in the leaves, and they will even eat the stalk. We recommend slug and snail baiting 2 weeks after planting and continue to bait throughout the season."

SPIDER MITES- "The most common predator to dahlias. Typically looks like your plant needs more water. Most plant will begin with yellow spots on the leaves and then the leaves will begin browning completely, working its way up the entire plant."

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EARWIGS & CUCUMBER BEETLE “(similar to a lady bug, but green instead of red)- They are mainly a nuisance, while eating many petals of the blooms, they are really not hurting the dahlia plant itself. They fly or crawl in daily and are very hard to control.”

MILDEW “Most commonly shows up in the fall. The leaves will begin to get a white powdery mildew or spots on the leaves.”

DIVIDING TUBERS

There is some debate on when to divide tubers, in the fall when the tuber is moist or in the spring when the skin is leathery and harder to slice through. The defining determination might be the eyes – which are not easily identifiable in the fall, but in the spring, the fresh sprout will be making its appearance and will help you in deciding where to split. Reflecting back to the earlier information on the eyes, remember that the eye is connected to the stalk by a neck that is attached to the tuber. The eye is considered the brain and the tuber the food source. To grow, the dahlia needs both the brain and food source. When dividing you will need to make sure that each section has at least one eye to grow. The [Swan Island video](#) does an excellent job of demonstrating this process. The method they use to assure an eye is present in each tuber is to split the clump of tubers across the crown/stalk so that the tubers always remain intact. A second division in the opposite direction will quarter the clump providing additional plants. Watching the video is highly recommended. It is also important to have a very sharp tool to do the cutting. Swan Island Tuber Splitting Demonstration; You can purchase one of these tools from Swan Island.



Salomon Run

STORING TUBERS

Just as each step before this is one more step where there are differing opinions on what is the best method of storing the tubers. But one thing that all agree on is DO NOT ALLOW THE TUBERS TO FREEZE. Once they have experienced temperatures below freezing they are no longer viable. It only takes one time. However, it is important to keep them cool and moist and this is where the opinions diverge. If you are confused it is suggested that you try various methods and you can decide what method is most successful for you. One option is to clean them allowing, to dry for a couple hours to overnight, placing them in a cardboard box separating layers with newspapers. A second option comes from Swan Island: “Use a storage medium such as slightly dampened Peat Moss, Sand, or Pet bedding material (sawdust/Shavings). Tubers should be stored in crates or cardboard boxes. We recommend lining the containers with 10-12 sheets of newspaper. Start with your packing medium in the bottom and layer tubers and medium until the container is full. Never store in sealed plastic bags or plastic containers. Store in a cool, dry area (temp. of 40-50 degrees). Too warm they will wrinkle/shrivel and too cold they will freeze/rot. Please check your tubers once a month throughout the winter months.”

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A third option is of using vermiculite as a medium. This is very nicely described by the [American Dahlia Society](#) also providing information on treating with a fungicide. A fourth option – one that has seen quite a bit of success - is treating them with a fungicide and wrapping them tight in saran wrap. This is also covered by the American Dahlia Society and is their preferred method. See the above link for details. And lastly, an option from the old lady down the street method, dig them up, put them all in a plastic bag and store in the basement and not worry about them until it is time to plant – “It has always worked for me!” she says. Note: Do not store directly on cement floor – this will pull the moisture out of the tubers. Store them above on shelves.

PURCHASING TUBERS Yes, here is the information on purchasing tubers at the very end of the article. Not because it isn't the first thing to do BUT because it is! Now that you know all about dahlias and are excited to start this fun, exciting AND somewhat challenging adventure here is what you need to know. Dahlia tubers can be purchased in a variety of ways but first it is good to know dahlia sales begin in November or December and if you wait until planting season you will not have the selection to choose from that you would before Christmas. With that said one of the places you can find tubers from now until planting season is the home and garden center and the big box stores. While the quality of some may not be as good as those direct from the suppliers they may be an option for this season. You can also purchase your plants there in late May and not have to bother at all with the tubers – definitely a more expensive option. The next option is from Dahlia Societies, which host their tuber sales in early spring. Some local options include:

[Michigan Dahlia Association](#) is offering a tuber sale; April 13th 2pm-4:30pm Matthaei Botanical Gardens; 1800 N. Dixboro, Ann Arbor; Room 125;

[Southeastern Michigan Dahlia Society](#)

[West Michigan Dahlia Society](#)

There are many dahlia suppliers and a Google search will bring up many for you to choose from. Also the dahlia societies provide links to suppliers.

Wishing you an exciting dahlia adventure!
Kit Puroll

Researched and written by Kit Puroll for the April, 2019 issue of DTE
Photograph Courtesy Kit Puroll



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The Elegant, the Beguiling and Challenging Dahlia - Feature Article Endnotes

- 1 - The Arnoldia; The Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, The History of the Dahlia, written by Paul D. Sorensen, Assistant Professor Northern Illinois University. Sorensen's extensive research and authority present a respected account of the history of the Dahlia. Sorensen relies on two ancient documents that place the Dahlia in this region in the 16th Century: The Badianus Manuscript, An Aztec Herbal of 1552 written first in Nahuatl by Martinus de la Cruz and The Hernandez' book Rerum Medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus seu Plantarum, Animalium, Mineralium Mexicanorum Historia (happily, often abbreviated simply The-saurus) written in 1577 (published in 1651)
- 2 - [National Dahlia Society](#)
- 3 - [Integrated Pest Management, University of Missouri; Dahlia: The Forgotten Flower](#)
- 4 - [Michael Genovese, Summer Dream Farms; February 21st FB post](#)
- 5 - MSUE; Master Gardener Training Manual; Plant Propagation; pg. 23
- 6 - Swan Island Dahlias; [How to Grow Dahlias](#);
- 7 - [The American Dahlia Society; ADS Dahlia University; Grooming the Dahlia](#)
- 8 - The American Dahlia Society; ADS Dahlia University; [Grooming the Dahlia](#)
- 9 - Swan Island; [Dahlia Storage](#)
- 10 - American Dahlia Society; [Dahlia University](#).



SUMMER DREAM FARMS SEPTEMBER 2018

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Fascinating World of Ants

Location: Webinar 1.5 Educational Hours

Date: Now available online see below for link

Cost: Free

Description: Speaker: Dr. Erwin 'Duke' Elsner, aka The Bug Man. Almost everybody knows a bit about ants - they are insects, most of them are small, and they can be quite annoying when they get into a house. Some species do have the potential to be serious household pests, some can sting and be hazardous, but most are no trouble at all. Pests or not, there is a lot to know about these fascinating creatures! This session will feature information on several common species of ants found in Michigan, including identification, nesting preferences, food preferences, understanding ant behavior, and management

[The Fascinating World of Ants](#)" Please use the password MG2019 to access the recorded webinar. Please join us on Saturday April 27th for our annual, FREE (optional) Bare Root Plant Class and Plant Sale which will benefit the MSU Extension Grand Ideas Garden!

MSU Extension Grand Ideas Garden—Bare Root Plant Event and Sale

Location: Grand Rapids

Date: Saturday, April 27th 9 am - 11:30 am

Cost: Free

Brochure and Registration: [2019 Bare Root Plant Sale and Class](#)

Description: Spring is very quickly upon us and we know you will want to get a jump on planting perennials in your garden. We are excited to announce this free educational program paired with a Bare Root Plant Sale that a team of Extension Master Gardeners has planned just for plant enthusiasts like you. Growing bare root plants saves money and gives you the jump on spring with quick establishment and easy acclimation. The best deer-resistant perennials, thrifty natives, and plants that support pollinators are in the line-up. Varieties that do well in sun such as Allium and Baptisia and plants that do well in shade including Epimedium and native ferns will grace your gardens for years to come. We hope you can join us!

Registration Deadline: April 21st

Emerald Ash Borer Webinar

Location: [Online Emerald Ash Borer University](#)

Cost: Free

Description: Cliff Sadof, Purdue University entomologist and emerald ash borer researcher, will cover the progress that's been made in the fight against EAB and how you can apply improved management techniques to your own yard or in your tree care business.

A complete list of [Master Gardener Educational Webinars](#) is located from the VMS website

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There's a certain excitement in the air! I believe we gardeners are the very first on earth to feel spring coming. We feel something in our bones! Ants feel it too. They'll be visiting my home soon... Here's the March issue of some of our Hotline inquiries:

A caller just bought a new home. His lawn leading to the river is shady. He wanted to know what he should plant under those conditions.



Of course, there are plenty of beautiful plants and flowers that will thrive in shade (vegetables-not so much.) In shade, you can still maintain color, height and other factors that make any landscape so attractive. For starters, read ahead:

[Shady Lawn Alternatives](#)

[Smart Tree and Shrubs for Natural Shoreline Plantings](#)

How fast is the turnaround for soil test results?

At the time this question was called in (early March), the caller was told that if he sent his soil sample in right away, the wait may not be too long- maybe a week or two. By the time you read this, it's more than likely many of us are thinking the same thing- "I've got to get my soil tested!" The earlier you send in for results, the less of a log-jam there will be of soil waiting to be tested especially this time of year before planting begins. Easy steps for getting your test results here: [MSU Soil Test](#)



This caller wanted to know how much seed potatoes she needs to buy and what is the spacing she needs to plant them in 46 square feet?

Since seed potatoes need to be planted 9-12 inches apart, she needs about 46 seed potatoes for her 46 sq. feet. She'll need to refer to the packaging or catalog to determine how many pounds she will need. There is much more here if you want to be successful planting potatoes: [A Guide to Growing Potatoes in your Home Garden](#)



RECIPES & MORE

CRUSTLESS SPINACH QUICHE

Submitted by Vicki Laurin

Ingredients

- 1 cup chopped onion
- 1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, thawed and well drained
- 2/3 cup finely chopped fully cooked ham
- 5 large eggs
- 3 cups shredded Muenster or Monterey Jack cheese
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper

Directions

In a large skillet, saute onion and mushrooms in oil until tender. Add spinach and ham; cook and stir until the excess moisture is evaporated. Cool slightly. Beat eggs; add cheese and mix well. Stir in spinach mixture and pepper; blend well. Spread evenly into a greased 9-in. pie plate or quiche dish. Bake at 350° for 40-45 minutes or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean.

Notes:

- *Be sure to fully drain spinach before mixing.*
- *For perfectly cooked quiche, keep an eye on dish as it nears baking time to make sure the top doesn't overcook.*
- *For extra cheesy, grate about 1/4 cup extra cheese on top just before it is done.*

NOTICES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

MGAGCM MAIL

ALL correspondence should be sent to the MGAGCM mailing address: PO Box 981, Grand Blanc, 48480 and not be mailed to the Extension Office or put in the Treasurer's file at the Extension Office.

RECIPES

Inviting all members to share their favorite recipes. Send us recipes for your best mouthwatering pie, succulent stew, tasty casserole, crowd pleasing appetizer. Please email your recipe to Kit Puroll: all_4_adventure@hotmail.com

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW TODAY GOAL SETTING COMMITTEE

Inviting members to share their ideas and synergy in planning and setting goals for MGAGCM.

We will have our first committee meeting Thursday, April 25th Noon - 2pm.

The committee will be using a strategic planning model to set a 3-year goal plan flowing from the organizations vision and mission. This committee will have a limited timeline with an objective of having completed goals prior to fall.

We look forward to creating a dynamic and exciting plan for tomorrow!

Please email the Committee Chair, Kit Puroll all_4_adventure@hotmail.com - before the first meeting - if you would like to join this committee. We encourage new and established members to come share their ideas and be part of this exciting step into the future!

MSU EXTENSION GENESEE COUNTY MASTER GARDENER RECOGNITION BANQUET Sponsored by the Master Gardener Association of Genesee County Michigan Thursday, April 18th, 2019 at Crossroads Village (Mill St. Warehouse)

5:30 - 6:00 pm - Welcome Reception and Social

6:00 - 6:45 pm - Dinner

6:45 - 7:00 pm - Speaker from MSU Extension

7:00 - 8:00 pm - Volunteer Recognition

You must RSVP to attend. Extension Master Gardeners may bring one additional guest. All attending must register individually.

RSVP: [Genesee Extension Master Gardener Banquet](#) (RSVP deadline is April 16th)

Please contact Barslund Judd (810)-244-8531 with any questions or registration problems.

The banquet will be a free potluck event. MGAGCM will provide the main dish of chicken. Attendees are requested to bring a dish to pass. Those whose last name begins with the letters:

- A through O -- bring a salad, side dish or appetizer
- P through Z -- bring a dessert

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Words from the President

Happy Spring! After a long, cold winter the wait is almost over, and that means gardening season is just around the corner.

As I mentioned, during the February membership meeting, we are looking for ways to improve our meetings and membership. Since then a survey was created with questions contributed by the membership and board. This survey was recently sent out to our membership and we received about 30 responses. I want to thank everyone who took the time to answer this survey - your thoughts and suggestions are helping us find ways to better serve the membership through our monthly meetings, improve communication, and increase opportunities to engage our members. We hope you find these changes beneficial and look forward to seeing you at our next meeting.

If you haven't checked out our MGAGCM website, please do so. On the website the membership meeting minutes, as well as the board meeting minutes, have been added to the password protected pages. If you do not know the password you can contact myself or Kay McCullough- we will not post it publically so it remains secure. Along with the minutes are SOPs, and a blog where gardeners can swap or sell plants and garden tools or share some garden tidbits and tips. The DTE has also been added to the website, so please visit regularly to see all the updates.

Also, April is our annual awards banquet month and I want to take a moment to applaud every member of our association. Each and everyone of our chairpersons, who take time to organize and communicate with other volunteers to make each project a success. Thank you to all volunteers and no matter how large your project is you are making a difference and educating Genesee County and that's what makes Genesee County Master Gardeners so awesome. Thank you one and all! Moving Forward.....

Vicki Laurin



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MGAGCM DOWN TO EARTH NEWSLETTER

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SAVE THE DATE DECEMBER 2019

- Mon, Apr 01** MGAGCM Board Meeting
Sat, Apr 13 Gardening and All That Jazz
Oakland County Gardening Conference
Sun, Apr 14 Last day for early registration
for IMGC -Valley Forge PA
Thu, Apr 18 Awards Banquet/Membership meeting

THIS NEWSLETTER PREPARED BY

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Edited by Sylvia Hansen

CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITES

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Plant & Pest Hotline

(810) 244-8548
Hours: Hotline winter hours are: Friday,
9:00 am to 12:00 pm.
geneseeplantpest@anr.msu.edu

Public Office Hours:

8 am - 12:00 and 1:00 pm-4:00 pm
Monday through Friday

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AN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

**MSU EXTENSION GENESEE COUNTY
MASTER GARDENER RECOGNITION BANQUET**
Sponsored by
Master Gardener Association of Genesee County Michigan
Thursday, April 18th, 2019
Crossroads Village (Mill St. Warehouse)

MGAGCM DOWN TO EARTH NEWSLETTER

