

NOTES FOR EXHIBITORS AND KEEN GARDENERS

By John Woodfield

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Growing dahlias



Darbro Marianne/Colerette

Dahlias at the Xeriscape Garden did very well, better than in any of our home gardens, and it is interesting to reflect on our methods there.

First, after lifting the dahlias in May last year, a green manure crop consisting of mainly lupins was planted and that crop turned into the soil in late August/early September, applying garden lime at the rate of a handful per two square metres. This was allowed to break down before the main planting of tubers in late October.

Stakes were driven in at approximately 750mm intervals, the same or a little more space between rows, and tubers then planted beside each stake. Very little else was done at this stage except to

replant the odd tuber when the birds playfully pulled the new growth out, tuber and all, just as the plants began to grow.

The next step was to 'stop the plants' by removing the centre growth as they reached approximately 200mm high. This promotes lateral growth from lower in the plants. At the same time the first two figure-eight ties were made around the stakes. The plants were tied regularly as they grew and some disbudding was carried out in January. Some mulch was applied to the smaller beds and June kept the larger ones weeded.



Bracken Sarah/Medium formal dec.

Due to good showers during January very little extra water was used and the only feeding carried out has been a monthly application of Prolific. As the weather became hot and dry the plants were watered heavily once a week either early or late in the day, but no spraying of any description was carried out. Tying and disbudding of plants was continued as time and conditions allowed and yet even now in April, the plants are healthy, with very little mildew or insect damage, though the bees are having a great time with the open centred types such as the Colerettes, Orchids and singles. If you want these types to

look good, you must pick them before the stamens start to rise from the centre and let them develop after cutting, and most of these will continue to develop after picking whereas other types will not continue to develop.

Overall, growing good dahlias means you need to focus on the following:

- good preparation,
- spacing between plants for good air circulation,
- no over watering

It will also help to remove flowers as they fade, ensure there is no competition from trees or shrubs growing close, tie plants every few weeks and do a little disbudding.

Remember a lot of the dahlias that win at many of the major shows including the Royal Easter Show in Sydney will be available through the Society's plant stall at the HSOC shows in October and November.

SPRING BULBS: Now is the time to check that all new spring bulbs have been planted except for Dutch Iris. which can be planted until June with good results. Those who grow most daffodils in pots, need to remove them from their summer resting place, ensure that the growing medium is well-saturated and that there are no slugs and snails hiding in the lips of the pots. Continue watering at least once a week if it does not rain in mid-winter.

Increase the amount and frequency of water as the buds start to appear at the end of winter. Contrary to some advice we find that feeding our potted bulbs as they are growing ensures better displays the next season rather than heavy feeding after flowering.



We use Seamungus and a general fertilizer rich in potash together with a three weekly application of Prolific.

Narcissus Angel's Whisper left

ROSES: It's time to prepare for and select new roses to ensure that you find the right cultivar for the show bench. You have probably already made a choice, based on seeing our show exhibits locally and elsewhere.

Most roses have good and bad points, eg, a rose such as **'Signature' Rose David Austin 'Mary Rose'** will usually need a couple of years to settle down and produce consistently top quality flowers.



'Moonstone' is a cultivar that thrives in some areas such as Sydney and Melbourne but it is very hard to obtain good flowers here with the number of petals as it tends to ball

due to the temperature variations in spring but can give good flowers in late summer and early autumn.

'**Gemini**' is quite the opposite, being best in early spring and late autumn when it holds better because it has less petals.

'**Kardinal**' is about right. as long as it is well-fed and watered more to keep the size up.

'City of Newcastle' is a very reliable red rose but does not hold its perfect shape for as long as some others. It is still a rose that is very versatile in our climate. Unfortunately it is not always in the catalogues.

One flower that tends to attract attention every time it wins in the bunch classes at shows is '**Fairytale Queen**' (sometimes known by the syn. 'Marchen Konigen') a very pale pink rose with long upright stems. It does not seem to like our temperature variations, or perhaps we have grown it in the wrong place.

Of last year's new releases, one that stood out, not so much as an exhibition rose but certainly for a good clean and different coloured rose, was '**Honey Dujon**'. This has colouring a little like 'Julia's Rose' and has well-shaped blooms with colouring described as warm golden brown which then turns to honey yellow as it ages. A very attractive garden rose which will flower in partly-shaded areas.

The other good clean cultivar we tried was the cluster rose, '**Bold Seduction**', which has a deeper pink edging than the original 'Seduction' and holds its colour better in hot conditions.

Now to this year's selections: a couple more '**City of Newcastle**', we will try another 'Grand Amore' and a couple of the new releases, maybe '**Fire-Fighter**' and '**Isn't She Lovely**'.

ANNUALS: Those wishing to grow a few annuals such as violas, pansies and poppies for the show bench, should plant them as soon as possible to ensure good root growth through winter. Violas and pansies can be easier to maintain if grown in pots for control of slugs and snails and removal of spent flowers. While on the subject of annuals, everyone loved the new African Marigolds we exhibited this year, which were seedlings from Woodlyn called Zulu Double Gold.■