

## DAHLIAS: A WINNIPEG GROWER/VDS MEMBER

January 2015



**I enjoy gardening/flowers,-and the wine that comes at Day's end.**

**After I discovered the beauty of tuberous begonias, I searched for a companion flower: i.e. something that blooms all season long could be easily hibernated, and then resurrected the following year. I suggested to Dr Dave McIntosh, an old friend and gardener, that he might consider the tuberous begonia story. Finally, at a dinner event at his home one summer about 6 years ago, he showed me his wonderful dahlia cultivar gardens. I had *found* that Companion plant/flower.**



**Along with David, a VDS member, I attended the next VDS meeting. The VDS is such a fine garden Club and from it, I have learned much about growing Dahlias. At that meeting's close, my first VDS meeting, a member (a woman) who had done a presentation, gave me a, "*vassio meggos*" FD A tuber .The outstanding bloom of V Meggas become the #1 cultivar of my gardens: propagated, I grow it in multiples and in 2014, a trio of pots were boulevard planted producing a record 17 gorgeous heads, an incredible display for my neighbors to stop and admire.**

**Today, my Dahlia gardens consist of sizes AA, A, and a few BB, Ball, P. Forms I prefer are FD, ID, SC and a few WL.**



**Dave grew his Dahlias in *pots*, so consequently, I started this way, making it much easier to select the soil mix I wanted and in the fall, to root extract and process these beauties for hibernation. Today, I grow about 50 cultivars in about 75 pots: each plastic container about 12 inches wide by 12 deep.**



**Soil mix, I started with a basic mixture of 5 way soil, peat moss, perlite, sand, bagged manure, I evolving my potting soil mix from 100 compost (which worked quite well) to**

what I now do: 20% 6-7 year *farm* horse manure, 20% leaf mold, 20% seaweed compost, 20% ordinary compost and 20 % extremely rich and black alluvial black soil breaded with a very fine glacial sand.

My main cultivar sources are Ferncliff, Wynn (so sorry for this tragedy) and Les Connell.

The spring season commences in early March, tuber wake up time. After correct growth is achieved, I pot, the tuber laid horizontal on a bed of worm casting: usually early April when the Winnipeg sun is strong, the snow is melting and the flood water receding. Stored now in my garage, the pots are carried to our back yard during warmer frost free days and garage returned in the evening 70-75 Dahlia 12 in pots and 100 tuberous begonia 8 in pots have a total weight of around 3500 pounds, i.e., the daily round trip is over 7000 pounds : very healthy exercise. May brings warm weather, at which time every pot is garden countersunk in some colour balance order and then topped with one inch of aged wood chip mulch, great water evaporation preventer. Each pot is caged with a tomato cage and 2 ft foot stakes are pot implanted, supplemented with 5 and 6 foot bamboo stakes outside the pots implanted for later support assisted with Velcro tapping.



May brings frost free nights allowing the dahlias to grow rapidly and by mid June I have 20 % of my plants in blossom (and after going through the process of pinching, budding, virus checking, etc). Winnipeg summers can have some very hot days with shade temperatures approaching plus 40. The dahlias usually go into heat shock so in the evening I *base* water their pots.

I computer control all the dahlias by name, form, and colour. Height, first flower date, etc using Excel spreadsheets. The first control column is a number, i.e., #42 Vassio Meggas, and so forth. Thus, I think of my dahlias by number and by cultivar name.

During the grow/flower season, I fertilize the dahlias using worm casting tea, a little 20-20-20, some 10-60+-60+ and Epson salt.



After the first frost attack in late September/early October, I prepare for “shutdown”.

The pots are easily soil extracted, dumped and the dahlia root structure washed and dried for two days. Tuber sectioning is relatively easy using my two cutting tools: wood carving tools purchased from Lee Valley: they always stay sharp, I have the cut/ scars proving this.

I have refined my storage procedures to what I now do; using large Ziploc freezer bags (sized 27cm by 28 cm). Same cultivars tubers are bagged (only so many tubers per bag thus some take two bags) with a little perlite and wood chips. In the 20134 I had 100% of my tuber make it live for the 2014 season. Obviously too many tubers for me, and, since the VDS tuber sale so too far away, I supply free tubers to a select group of neighbors and friends, now happy with the dahlias they grow. The zip lock tubers, all identified, are box packed and kept in a cool place during our winter.

Presently considered is the creation of a Winnipeg Dahlia Society (or maybe a Dahlia Begonia society) as both tuber types are winter prepared, stored the same manner, continuously flower at the same time up until frost time: all of this makes for a fine yard.

At days end my wife and I admire how fortunate we are in having our Dahlias and



Begonias, all as a result of being a VDS society member and by



Dave McIntosh (Dr. Dahlia) and his wife having us for dinner.

The VDS members are an exceptionally fine group, I am proud of my association.

Bill & Evelyn Head  
Winnipeg