Open-centred Dahlias

Sue Drew
Trials Recorder, RHS Garden Wisley
The RHS Trial of Dahlias

History of the Trial
Brent Elliott, Historian, RHS Lindley Library

Dahlias were just being introduced into England at the time when the Horticultural Society (later to become the RHS) was founded. John Wedgwood, one of the Society's founders, was an enthusiastic grower of dahlias, and published an article on them in the first volume of the Society's Transactions. When the regular sequence of flower shows was begun at the Society's garden at Chiswick in 1831, there were seven competitions set for their respective seasons, with the dahlia competition taking place in September.

After the founding of the Floral Committee in 1859, a programme of plant trials was begun, the trials taking place at the Society's garden at Chiswick. The first trial results to be published were for Pompon dahlias; the trials took place in 1862, and the report was published in 1863. Dahlias were included in a trial of bedding plants and annuals in 1868.

Trials specifically of dahlias did not recur until the 1890s. In 1895 a trial of Cactus dahlias was held at Chiswick. Another trial of Pompon dahlias took place in 1899, and further Cactus dahlia trials in 1900 and 1903. After the move to Wisley the trials resumed, with Cactus dahlias in 1905.

Reginald Cory

All these trials had been for dahlias in their decorative roles, as flowers for the greenhouse and table decoration, not as flowers for the garden. Reginald Cory, a Welsh coal millionaire and horticultural enthusiast (and future President of the National Dahlia Society), undertook to stage the first trials of dahlias as garden plants, and used his own garden at The Dyffryn, Glamorgan, for the purpose. Virtually all the beds in his garden were turned over to dahlias for the 1913 trial, which was judged by a Joint Committee of the RHS and the National Dahlia Society. More than a thousand species and cultivars were submitted, and the RHS Journal published details of the uniform treatment each plant received to ensure that they were being judged to a common standard. The Gardeners' Chronicle reported: ‘The Dyffryn gardens comprise upwards of 40 acres and the provision of flower beds and borders is so liberal that immense numbers of dahlias can be cultivated with ease, but this fact notwithstanding, the ground was planted up to the very last foot.’ Cory was given a Gold Medal for his work.

Cory staged a further trial in 1914 but then came the First World War. As a precedent had been set for trialling dahlias as garden flowers, the process was resumed in the 1920s. Dahlias have been the subject of a standing trial ever since, with cultivars selected for trial by the Dahlia Subcommittee, and reports published regularly.

Front cover: Dahlia ‘Moonfire’ (Photo Sue Drew)

Trial Objectives
Trials are conducted as part of the RHS’s charitable mission to inform, educate, and inspire gardeners. The aim of the Dahlia Trial is to compare, demonstrate and evaluate a range of cultivars submitted by individuals and nurserymen. The Trial also allows for plants to be correctly named, described, photographed, and mounted in the herbarium, providing an archive for the future. Cultivars are referred for further assessment in the Trial. Following assessment in trial, those meeting the required standard receive the RHS Award of Garden Merit (AGM).

The Award of Garden Merit

The Award of Garden Merit is only awarded to plants that are:

- Excellent for ordinary garden use
- Available
- Of good constitution
- Essentially stable in form and colour
- Reasonably resistant to pests and diseases
- Reasonably easy to grow

Reginald Cory

Front cover: Dahlia ‘Moonfire’ (Photo Sue Drew)
Dahlias Classifications

**Group 1: Single-flowered**
Single outer ring of florets, which may overlap, the centre forming a disc.

- D. ‘Moonfire’

**Group 2: Anemone-flowered**
One or more outer rings of generally flattened ray florets surrounding a dense group of tubular florets, which are longer than the disc florets in single dahlias, and showing no disc.

- D. ‘Ryecroft Marge’

**Group 3: Collerette**
A single outer ring of generally flat ray florets, with a ring of small florets (the collar), the centre forming a disc.

- D. ‘Don Hill’

**Group 4: Waterlily**
Fully double blooms characterised by broad, generally sparse ray florets, either straight or slightly involute along their length giving a shallow appearance. Depth should be less than half the diameter of the bloom.

- D. ‘Charlie Dimmock’

**Group 5: Decorative**
Fully double blooms showing no disc. The ray florets are generally broad and flat, or slightly twisted and usually bluntly pointed, and may be involute for no more than 75% of their length.

- D. ‘Dikara Midnight’

**Group 6: Ball**
Fully double blooms, ball shaped or slightly flattened. The ray florets are blunt or rounded at the tips, spirally arranged, with margins involute for at least 75% of the length of the florets.

- D. ‘Blyton Softer Gleam’

**Group 7: Pompon**
Fully double, spherical blooms of miniature size, not exceeding 50mm in diameter, with florets involute for the whole of their length.

- D. ‘Will’s Ringwood Rosie’

**Group 8: Cactus**
Fully double blooms, the ray florets are usually pointed, the majority narrow and revolute for 50% or more of their length and either straight or incurving.

- D. ‘Lakeland Sunset’

**Group 9: Semi-Cactus**
Fully double blooms, ray florets usually pointed, and revolute for more than 25% of their length and less than 50% of their length (longitudinal axis), broad at base and either straight or incurving.

- D. ‘Julie’s Delight’

**Group 10: Miscellaneous**
Any dahlias which do not fall into one of the listed groups e.g. Peony-flowered dahlias.

- D. ‘Bishop of Llandaff’

**Group 11: Fimbriated**
Ray florets evenly split or notched into two or more divisions, uniformly throughout the bloom creating a fringed effect. Petals may be flat, involute, revolute, straight, incurving or twisted.

- D. ‘Anna Cozens’

**Group 12: Single-Orchid**
Single outer ring of florets surrounding the disc. Ray florets are uniformly either involute or revolute.

- D. ‘Juul’s Allstar’

**Group 13: Double-Orchid**
Fully double blooms, showing no disc. Ray florets are narrowly lanceolate and either involute or revolute.

- D. ‘Mayan Pearl’

**Lilliput dahlias**
A low-growing type of dahlia usually no more than 30cm in height having single, semi-double or double florets attaining 2.6cm or so in diameter. Especially suitable for borders or display in containers on patios.

**Dwarf bedding dahlias**
The use of ‘Dw.B’ after the classification of a cultivar indicates that these are dwarf bedding dahlias, not usually exceeding 60cm in height.

**Source:** Nineteenth Supplement to The Tentative Classified List and International Register of Dahlia Names 1969 (2007)
Selection guide

AGM = Award of Garden Merit (H3) = hardy outside in some regions or particular situations or which, while usually grown outside in summer, needs frost-free protection in winter.

This selection guide includes AGM dahlias from a number of trials and those of particular interest in the 2008 trial.

‘Ann Breckenfelder’
AGM (H3) 2004 Group 3
H: 140cm FD: 10cm
Flower vivid red, streaked yellow on reverse; collar green-yellow flushed vivid red at base. Yellow-orange disc. Raised by C Geerlings.

‘Bishop of Llandaff’
AGM (H3) 1995 Group 10
H: 100cm FD: 10cm

‘Brookfield Delight’
AGM (H3) 1999 Group 1
H: 70cm FD: 4.5cm

‘Cascade Ken’
AGM (H3) 2006 Group 3
H: 170cm FD: 12cm

‘Chessy’
AGM (H3) 2002 Group 1
H: 40cm FD: 5cm
Flower yellow. Disc lime-yellow. Raised by Topsvoort.

‘Clair de Lune’
AGM (H3) 1995 Group 3
H: 130cm FD: 12.5cm

‘Collerette Princess’
AGM (H3) 2006 Group 3
H: 154cm FD: 7.5cm

‘Carreg Cyril’s Girl’
AGM (H3) 2005 Group 3
H: 123cm FD: 10.5cm
Flower apricot-orange, collar touched yellow with pale tips. Disc orange-yellow. Raised by C Bright.

‘Caroline Beck’

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### Key to suppliers

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### Key

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Measurements given are taken from the plants in trial.

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### ‘Dovegrove’

**Group 1**

**H:** 140cm  **FD:** 11cm


9, 12

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### ‘Exotic Dwarf’

**Group 1 Dw.B**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm


1

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### ‘Fascination’

**AGM (H3) 1994**  **Group 10**

**H:** 110cm  **FD:** 16cm

Flower purplish pink, semi-double. Disc red-brown with orange-yellow. Raised by Elsdon.

1

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### ‘Honka’

**AGM (H3) 2000**  **Group 12**

**H:** 120cm  **FD:** 12cm

Flower greenish yellow, Disc orange-yellow. Raised by J A Kieffer.

1

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### ‘Freya’s Thalia’

**AGM (H3) 1996**  **Group 1**

**H:** 75cm  **FD:** 6cm

Flower deep red. Strong orange disc. Raiser unknown.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Inflammation’

**AGM (H3) 1996**  **Group 12**

**H:** 55cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower strong orange, streaked with vivid reddish orange. Disc vivid orange-yellow. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Hillcrest Regal’

**AGM (H3) 2003**  **Group 3**

**H:** 130cm  **FD:** 10cm

Flower dark red, collar dark red with lighter blends. Yellow disc. Raised by L Jackson.

12

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### ‘Hillcrest Regal’

**AGM (H3) 2003**  **Group 3**

**H:** 130cm  **FD:** 10cm

Flower dark red, collar dark red with lighter blends. Yellow disc. Raised by L Jackson.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Inflammation’

**AGM (H3) 1996**  **Group 12**

**H:** 55cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower strong orange, streaked with vivid reddish orange. Disc vivid orange-yellow. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12

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### ‘Harvest Amanda’

**AGM (H3) 1997**  **Group 1**

**H:** 60cm  **FD:** 5cm

Flower reddish orange flushed vivid reddish orange at base, semi-double. Disc greenish yellow with red-brown. Raised by I Butterfield.

12
Selection guide

‘Keith’s Pet’
Group 1 Dw.B
H: 52cm    FD: 5.5cm
Flower white with pale yellow-green at the base. Disc vivid yellow. Flowers contrast well with the bronze stems and flower buds. Raised by K Hammett.
12, 14

‘Little Dorrit’
AGM (H3) 1996    Group 1 Lil
H: 73cm    FD: 5.5cm
Flower deep purplish red with a small black spot at the base. Vivid yellow disc. Raised by I Butterfield.
12

‘Magenta Star’
AGM (H3) 2008    Group 1
H: 130cm    FD: 13cm
3, 12

‘Marie Schnugg’
AGM (H3) 2000    Group 12
H: 130cm    FD: 13cm
Flower vivid red. Disc vivid yellow. Raised by T McNulty.
12

‘Moonfire’
AGM (H3) 1998    Group 1
H: 85cm    FD: 8cm
Flower orange-yellow flushed with vivid reddish orange at the base. Vivid orange-yellow disc. Raiser unknown.
1

‘Northwest Cosmos’
AGM (H3) 2006    Group 1
H: 180cm    FD: 14cm
12

‘Omo’
AGM (H3) 1996    Group 1 Lil
H: 70cm    FD: 6cm
Flower white. Disc strong orange-yellow. Raised by I Butterfield.
12

‘Orange Pathfinder’
Group 10
H: 72cm    FD: 10.5cm
Flower orange-yellow, flushed vivid red at base. Disc dark red and vivid yellow. Raised by J R Gott.
7

‘Pooh – Swan Island’
Group 3
H: 135cm    FD: 9cm
Flower red-orange with yellow at the tip, collar yellow. Disc golden yellow. Sometimes called ‘Pooh’. Raised by Swan Island Dahlias.
2, 5, 6, 11, 12

‘Preston Park’
AGM (H3) 1994    Group 1 Dw.B
H: 80cm    FD: 6cm
Flower deep scarlet flecked with yellow. Disc dark red with golden yellow. Raiser unknown.
2, 6, 9, 12

‘Premier’
AGM (H3) 2010    Group 1
H: 80cm    FD: 6cm
Flower bright yellow. Disc orange-red. Raised by I Butterfield.
12

‘Preston Park’
AGM (H3) 1994    Group 1 Dw.B
H: 80cm    FD: 6cm
Flower deep scarlet flecked with yellow. Disc dark red with golden yellow. Raiser unknown.
2, 6, 9, 12
Key

H: Plant height
FD: Flower diameter

Measurements given are taken from the plants in trial.

Key to suppliers

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9 Sampford Shrubs
10 Southon Plants
11 Station House Nurseries
12 The National Collection of Dahlias
13 Todd’s Botanics
14 Usual & Unusual Plants

‘Tally Ho’
AGM (H3) 1998 Group 1
H: 120cm FD: 9cm
Bright red flower. Disc dark red with yellow-orange. Raiser unknown.

‘Teesbrooke Red Eye’
AGM (H3) 2005 Group 3
H: 153cm FD: 9cm
Flower pink-purple, collar pale pink merging to yellow-orange towards the centre. Dark orange disc. Raised by P Orley.

‘Topmix Yellow’
Group 1 Dw.B
H: 49cm FD: 5cm
Flower greenish yellow. Disc brilliant orange-yellow. Raised by Ballego.

‘Trelyn Daisy’
AGM (H3) 2008 Group 3
H: 140cm FD: 10cm
Flower pure white with a golden yellow disc. Raised by R G Tudor.

‘Twynings’ After Eight’
AGM (H3) 2004 Group 1
H: 120cm FD: 8cm
Flower white, lightly veined with deep magenta. Yellow-orange disc. Very dark, almost black, foliage. Raised by M Twyning, Winchester Growers Ltd.

‘Twynings’ Candy’
AGM (H3) 2007 Group 1
H: 110cm FD: 9cm
Flower white with dark red at margins. Orange-yellow disc. Raised by M Twyning, Winchester Growers Ltd.

‘Twynings’ Chocolate’
AGM (H3) 2005 Group 1
H: 133cm FD: 10cm
Chocolate coloured flower. Disc red-orange with bright yellow. Raised by M Twyning, Winchester Growers Ltd.

‘Twynings’ Pink Fish’
AGM (H3) 2005 Group 3
H: 139cm FD: 10cm
Flower pink, deepening to burgundy at base. Collar pink with orange at base. Yellow-orange disc. Raised by M Twyning, Winchester Growers Ltd.

‘Twynings’ Smartie’
AGM (H3) 2005 Group 1
H: 178cm FD: 8cm
Flower cerise and white with a yellow disc. Raised by M Twyning, Winchester Growers Ltd.

‘Woodbridge’
AGM (H3) 2008 Group 1
H: 110cm FD: 10cm
Received the AGM as a foliage plant. Wonderful finely cut foliage with the added benefit of light purple flowers. Raised by K Hammett.

Open-centred Dahlias
The 2008 Trial was grown on a south-facing slope on the Portsmouth Field at Wisley. Manure was dug into the planting bed in autumn 2007 using a tractor-mounted spader. The plot was subsequently rotovated prior to planting. The soil on the site was analysed in mid March and fertiliser was applied in accordance with the RHS Soil Scientist’s recommendations.

Much of the material for the trial was produced from cuttings taken from the previous trial. Additional material was submitted in the form of tubers at the beginning of January 2008 (from which cuttings were taken for the trial) or as well-rooted cuttings by the end of April. The trial was planted out in early June.

The shorter entries, also suitable for planting in patio containers, were planted in blocks of four plants, 50cm apart each way. Support frames were put in place for the larger growing entries and these were planted side by side, approximately 60cm apart, through wire mesh. The mesh was gradually raised to provide support to the plants as they grew.

A drip irrigation system was used, providing water on planting and when necessary through the season. The plants were ‘stopped’ again in early July to encourage them to bush out and hasten the development of the side branches that would bear the flowers. The open-centred dahlias were not disbudded. Partial disbudding (removing some of the side buds from the flowering stems) was carried out on most other classifications to produce larger flowers with an adequate length of stem.

Problems which can affect dahlias

Dahlias are generally healthy plants but can sometimes be affected by the following:

Aphids
These can be removed by hand. Ladybirds, hoverfly larvae and lacewing larvae can act as a biological control. Alternatively insecticide can be used.

Earwigs
Feeding at night, earwigs will hide during the day and can be caught using upturned flower pots filled with straw placed on canes amongst the plants. Insecticide can be used if damage is excessive.

Slugs and snails
Barriers can be used to protect plants from slugs and snails. These include copper tape around patio containers and placing moisture-absorbent minerals or gel repellents around plants. Creatures which eat slugs/snails such as frogs, toads, hedgehogs, slow-worms, ground beetles and birds such as thrushes can also be encouraged into the garden. Traps are available to kill slugs and snails or the pests can be removed by hand on a mild, preferably damp, evening. They could either be moved to somewhere they will not be problematic or killed in hot water or a strong salt solution. Nematodes, a biological control, can also be used to kill slugs. Alternatively chemical controls such as slug pellets can be used against both slugs and snails.

Other pests
At Wisley predatory mites, *Phytoseiulus persimilis* (up to 22°C) and *Amblyseius californicus* (21–30°C dry conditions),
Dahlias are used as biological controls for glasshouse red spider mite. Alternatively insecticides can be used to control these pests and capsid bugs. Caterpillars sometimes cause damage to dahlias and can be removed if necessary.

Powdery mildews
Preventative measures include keeping the plants well watered and mulched so that the roots do not dry out. At Wisley affected plant material is removed and destroyed to help stop any further spread but fungicidal sprays can also be used.

Viruses
Dahlias are susceptible to several viruses including tomato spotted wilt virus, tobacco streak virus, dahlia mosaic virus and cucumber mosaic virus. Symptoms include ringspots, flower breaking, vein banding and mottling of the leaves. Plants may be stunted. Sometimes no symptoms are seen. There are no cures for viruses and any infected plants should be destroyed. If the virus is known, control of the vector may reduce disease spread.

Dahlias for bees
Andrew Halstead, Principal Entomologist, RHS Garden Wisley
Honey bees, and also some bumblebees and species of solitary bee, have declined in abundance in recent years. In the case of bumblebees and solitary bees, it is species that have fairly specific requirements in the types of flowers that they forage from that are most likely to be affected. These are generally species that are not capable of utilising garden flowers. The honey bee and the more common species of bumblebee use a wide range of both cultivated and wild flowers and are generally not likely to be short of suitable plants from which they can feed.

Not all dahlias are of value to bees and other flower-visiting insects. Multi-petalled dahlias, such as the Cactus and Pompon cultivars, are generally of less benefit as the extra petals impair access to the pollen-bearing parts of the flower head. It is the dahlias with open-centred flowers that are most likely to attract bees.

Dahlia species and the breeding work of Dr Keith Hammett
James Armitage, Botanist, RHS Garden Wisley
For variety of colour and form few garden plants compare with, and none surpass, dahlias. It is perhaps surprising then that almost all this variation, from the daintiest Dwarf Bedder to the largest Giant-flowered Decorative, is thought to have been produced from only two species.

There are thought to be approximately 35 species of *Dahlia*, most of which can be found in the mountains of Mexico. They range from small herbaceous perennials to scrambling vines and tree-like plants 9 metres tall. It is believed that for nearly 200 years after their introduction only two of these species, *D. coccinea* and *D. soorensii*, were involved in the breeding of our garden dahlias. All that changed when Dr Keith Hammett, a plant breeder in New Zealand, decided to try and utilise the genetic resources of some of the other species by crossing them with one another and with their cultivated relatives. By careful and deliberate breeding he has raised and introduced a range of exciting dahlias that combine the grace and simplicity of the wild plants with the intense colour displays of existing cultivars.

A new generation of singles
Dr Hammett’s breeding programme has provided some of the most remarkable single-flowered introductions of recent years. Perhaps foremost among them is the sumptuous ‘Magenta Star’ with magenta-pink ray florets and bluish red leaves. This has been joined by other striking cultivars such as ‘Tapestry’ with a red-orange central zone of coloration, ‘Danneverke’ with bright pink flowers tipped white and ‘Dovegrove’ with chocolate red blooms. ‘Home Run’ a dark-flowered plant, has *D. australis* in its lineage. New plants are being perfected and selected all the time and the range of colour, form and garden usage ever expanded.

Tree dahlias
Three species of *Dahlia* have become collectively known as the tree dahlias for their large size and arborescent habit. The biggest and best known of these is *D. imperialis* which is sometimes grown for exotic effect in British gardens and occasionally produces its lilac flowers around Christmas in almost frost-free regions. Hammett has been able to use a slightly smaller tree dahlia, *D. tenuicaulis*, crossed with other species, to produce the cultivar ‘Timothy Hammett’. This is a fine, shrubby, mauve-flowered plant used as a spectacular flowering hedge in parts of New Zealand. It has given rise to a yellow-flowered seedling named ‘Conundrum’ and further treedahlia crosses are soon to be introduced.

Breeding for foliage
In recent years there has been an explosion in the number of dark-leaved dahlia cultivars available, bred using the perennially popular ‘Bishop of Llandaff’ as a parent. Hammett, by introducing species such as *D. dissecta* and *D. apiculata* into his breeding programmes, has been able to develop a range of cultivars with not only dark, but also
White is the strongest colour in the garden and will always draw your eye and command attention, never more so than with D. ‘After Eight’, which with its almost black foliage and white flowers blends effectively with deep blue *Agapanthus* and the tall purple spires of *Salvia ‘Purple Majesty’*. D. ‘Fascination’ (purplish-pink semi-double flowers) combines well with white *Phlox* and soft yellow *Euryops pectinatus*.

**Herbarium**

*Susan Grayer, Herbarium Researcher, RHS Garden Wisley*

A standard specimen provides the definitive reference for a named cultivar. It may take the form of a dried pressed plant (herbarium specimen), an illustration or a description. The standard portfolio should include where the cultivar name was first published and described, and any supporting information which may help in the identification of the taxon, such as photographs and other associated data. Dahlias are well represented by standard specimens at Wisley, many being obtained through registration, and some via the trial. Dahlias make effective herbarium specimens, particularly the Collerettes and Singles. There are currently 183 herbarium specimens and 568 standard specimens of dahlias in the RHS Herbarium.

**Future breeding**

In 2009 the RHS awarded Dr Keith Hammett the Reginald Cory Memorial Cup for his innovative hybridisation work with *Dahlia*. The beauty and novelty of his introductions has inspired others and 2009 saw the introduction of ‘Joe Swift’ and ‘Perfect Partner’, products of a cross between ‘Magenta Star’ and *D. soorensenii* made by Jon Wheatley. The potential of *Dahlia* species as a resource in the production of ornamental plants has only begun to be explored. The interfertility and diversity of these species means that the coming years should provide many more exciting introductions to populate our gardens.

**Dahlias in the garden**

*Fergus Garrett, Head Gardener, Great Dixter*

Dahlias are one of the most joyous and generous of garden flowers. Bold and bright in clean tones from pastel pink to darkest purple, they have the ability to produce a riot of colour from July to October.

Judging them is a joy but be aware that any good garden dahlia must be well proportioned and not dominated by coarse leaves. Their flowers have to be presented above the body of foliage on stems stiff enough to carry their plentiful bounty. The best ones are free-flowering right into October, dazzling us with sensational colour.

*David Jewell, Superintendent, RHS Garden Wisley*

As Floral Superintendent at Wisley I’ve always been keen to promote the use of dahlias in many of our high profile display areas. They provide an invaluable contribution when used in the mixed borders, sub-tropical borders, bedding schemes and half-hardy border areas. Their rich colour range will suit most tastes coupled with mixed heights, flower shapes and sizes ranging from Singles and Collerettes, through to Pompons, Cactus, and Orchid dahlias.

This summer Wisley will feature two *Dahlia* borders each with a pastel or hot colour theme and will showcase 60 *Dahlia* cultivars. These have been grown purely as a demonstration to educate and inspire our visitors. Equally importantly it will highlight their garden suitability and value as ornamental plants.

**Perfect Plant Partners – David Jewell’s suggestions**

*Dahlia ‘Bishop of Llandaff’* or *D. ‘Tally Ho’*, both with bronze foliage, create strong contrast among marmalade-shaded heliunums (*Helinium ‘Waltraut’* and *H. ‘Bruno’*) with a diminutive foreground planting of the annual cigar plant, *Cuphea ignea*.

*D. ‘Honka’* often invites comments with its spidery yellow flowers amidst soft blue *Amsonia tabernaemontana* and background pink hybrid musk *Rosa ‘Cornelia’*. The strong foliage of *D. tenuicaulis* is exhibited in its filigree leaves.

**Background information**

beautifully cut foliage. These selections were originally given names such as ‘Scarlet Fern’ and ‘Knockout’ but are now often sold under names bearing the prefix MYSTIC. One of the finest foliage dahlias currently available is ‘Woodbridge’, a delicate and graceful Hammett introduction which exhibits the influence of *D. tenuicaulis* in its filigree leaves.
Dahlia Sub-Committee
Responsible for assessing and judging the trial in 2008, the Dahlia Sub-Committee was made up of plantmen, nurserymen, experts and dahlia enthusiasts who gave their time voluntarily to promote dahlias as garden plants.

Chairman: Graham Carey
Vice Chairman: Jon Wheatley
Members:
- Bill Boardman
- David Brown
- Alan Buller
- Eric Carter
- Ted Collins
- Paul Dalby
- Ron Dewberry
- Fergus Garrett
- Carl Hamnett
- Andy Jamieson
- David Kent
- Robin Pearce
Secretary: Sharon McDonald
Trials Recorder: Sue Drew

Registration of Dahlia cultivar names
The Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) is the International Cultivar Registration Authority (ICRA) for dahlias. It is recommended that all new cultivars are registered before plants are released or catalogued. No RHS award for any dahlia cultivar can be confirmed unless the name has been accepted by the ICRA. Applications to register dahlias can be made through: Ms Sharon McDonald, International Dahlia Registrar, RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey, GU23 6QB, England.

Dahlia suppliers
See RHS Plant Finder for widely available cultivars
www.rhs.org.uk/rhsplantfinder/plantfinder.asp
Aylett Nurseries Ltd, North Orbital Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire, AL2 1DH www.aylettnurseries.co.uk
Binny Plants, West Lodge, Binny Estate, Ecclesmachen Road, Nr Broxbourn, West Lothian, EH52 6NL www.binnyplants.co.uk
Dan’s Dahlias, 994 South Bank Road, Oakville, WA 98568, USA www.dansdahlias.com
Geerlings Dahlias, Kadijk 38, 2104AA Heemstede, Holland, The Netherlands www.geerlings-dahlia.nl
Halls of Heddon, West Heddon Nurseries, Heddon-on-the-Wall, Northumberland, NE15 0JS www.hallsfheddon.co.uk
JRG Dahlias, 22 Summervile Road, Milnthorpe, Cumbria, LA7 7DF www.jrg-dahlias.co.uk
Rose Cottage Plants, Bay Tree Farm, Epping Green, Essex, CM16 6PU, www.rosecottageplants.co.uk
Sampford Shrubs, Sampford Peverell, Tiverton, Devon, EX16 7EN www.samshrub.co.uk
Southon Plants, Mutton Hill, Dormansland, Lingfield, Surrey, RH7 6NP www.southonplants.com
Station House Nurseries, Station Road, Burton, South Wirral, Cheshire CH64 5SD www.eurodahlias.com
The National Collection of Dahlias, Winchester Growers Limited, Varfell Farm, Long Rock, Penzance, Cornwall, TR20 8AQ www.national-dahlia-collection.co.uk
Todd’s Botanics, West Street, Coggeshall, Colchester, Essex, CO6 1NT www.toddsbotanics.co.uk
Usual & Unusual Plants, Onslow House, Magham Down, Hailsham, East Sussex, BN27 1PL www.uuplants.co.uk

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Béatrice Henricot, Plant Pathology, RHS Garden Wisley
Sharon McDonald, International Dahlia Registrar, RHS Garden Wisley
Illustration by Niki Simpson www.nikisimpson.co.uk
Photographs by Sue Drew unless otherwise indicated

Further reading
National Dahlia Society, UK

Useful websites
American Dahlia Society www.dahlia.org
German Dahlia Society www.dahlie.net/en/index.html
National Dahlia Society www.dahlia-nds.co.uk
Registration of dahlias www.rhs.org.uk/plants/registration_dahlia.asp
The Growing World of Dahlias www.dahliaworld.co.uk
The RHS Herbarium www.rhs.org.uk/learning/research/herbarium.asp

RHS Gardening Advice on growing dahlias
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0406/aphids.asp
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0800/carwigs.asp
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0700/slugs.asp
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0700/snails.asp
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0601/red_spider_mite.asp
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0600/capsid_bug.asp
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0800/powdery_mildews.asp
www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profiles0804/dahlia_flower_balling.asp

Open-centred Dahlias 11
RHS Plant Trials

With so many different types of gardener and so many different cultivars available to them in each group of plants, it is important that a system of recommendation is in place to help with selection at point of sale. These recommendations must be clear and reliable to ensure that of the thousands of plants available in the UK, a proportion are known to be excellent garden plants. The RHS provides this information through its extensive programme of plant trials held at RHS gardens in the UK. The RHS Award of Garden Merit signifies the selection of the best cultivars for general garden use.

RHS plant trials serve the professional gardener who wants to know the range of plants available, including the latest breeding and selection programmes, with their distinctive characteristics and provenance. They also serve the amateur who wants to know which plants will grow and perform well in a particular garden situation.

The RHS has an unrivalled resource of knowledge and expertise and is therefore best placed to conduct plant trials for the UK gardening market.

RHS Trials Bulletins

**Begonia** Rex Cultorum Group: Number 16

**Canna**: Number 3

**Chilli Peppers**: Number 22

**Clematis alpina & C. macropetala**: Number 21

**Dahlias** (open centred): Number 24

**Daisies** (yellow perennial): Number 6

**Delphinium**: Number 5

**Fuchsia** (hardy): Number 12

**Geranium** (hardy) Stage 1: Number 10

**Geranium** (hardy) Stage 2: Number 14

**Geranium** (hardy) Stage 3: Number 18

**Hyacinthaceae** (little blue bulbs): Number 11

**Hydrangea paniculata**: Number 23

**Iris** (bearded): Number 17

**Lavenders** (hardy): Number 2

**Miscanthus**: Number 7

**Peppers** (sweet): Number 15

**Potatoes** (salad): Number 8

**Potentilla** (shrubby): Number 1

**Rhododendron yakushimanum** and hybrids: Number 13

**Runner Beans**: Number 19

**Saxifrages** (silver): Number 9

**Sedums** (herbaceous): Number 20

**Spiraea japonica** (with coloured leaves): Number 4

These bulletins can be viewed at a larger size on the RHS Website: www.rhs.org.uk/plants/trials_bulletins.asp

RHS Plant Trials and Assessments

Online publications, to complement the RHS Plant Trials Bulletins series

**Caryopteris**: Number 2

**Pervoskia**: Number 3

**Pittosporum tenuifolium** hybrids and cultivars: Number 1

Trials indexes can be obtained from The Trials Office, RHS Garden Wisley, Woking, Surrey GU23 6QB, Email: trials@rhs.org.uk

Trials reports on the web at www.rhs.org.uk/plants/award_plants.asp

The Royal Horticultural Society

The RHS is the UK’s leading gardening charity dedicated to advancing horticulture and promoting good gardening. Its charitable work includes providing expert advice and information, advancing horticulture, training the next generation of gardeners, helping school children learn about plants, and conducting research into plants, pests and environmental issues affecting gardeners. The RHS AGM plant trial scheme is an important part of this work.

The RHS receives no government grants and for every pound received from members’ subscriptions we need to raise more than twice as much again to fund our charitable work. We also rely on donations and sponsorship to supplement income from our garden operations, flower shows, shops and plant centres.

RHS Herbarium

The RHS Herbarium keeps a record of trial cultivars as dried specimens with detailed descriptions and photographic images. This forms an important reference for the horticultural industry. Any new cultivars are highlighted and a nomenclatural standard specimen is preserved and described.

The RHS Herbarium, stored at RHS Garden Wisley, is the largest active horticultural herbarium in the world. At present the collection contains about 80,000 herbarium specimens and over 40,000 images of plants. Material is actively collected from a wide spectrum of sources including RHS plant trials.

The RHS, the UK’s leading gardening charity

RHS Garden Wisley

Woking

Surrey

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e-mail: trials@rhs.org.uk

www.rhs.org.uk/trials

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