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Dahlia Talk *from tubers to blooms*

The Start of a Growing Obsession



2023 ADS National Show hosted by the Portland Dahlia Society

Pale Fire were the words Martha Stewart used to describe the Cafe au Lait dahlia. As I read the article in her magazine, *Living*, and saw the photo of the antique shades of blush, light peach and beige flowers, I was mesmerized by its beauty. Since marrying David in 2011, I had been successful growing shade-loving plants in our Colorado Springs backyard - begonias, impatiens, hostas. But the sun-demanding dahlia was new to me. Since David and I had just signed up for a 20 x 20 plot at our local community garden, I decided to follow Stewart's advice and I bought Erin Benzakein's book, *Discovering Dahlias*. I then bought eight tubers, three Cafe au Lait, three Shiloh Noelles and two Sweet Loves. Seven plants flowered profusely with what little knowledge I had and the following summer of 2022 I had 30 dahlia plants from the tubers that I successfully winterized 6,000 feet above sea level. Growing even more dahlias the second year at the community garden, I had more flowers than I knew what to do with. A big reason for the bloom and tuber success was the rich compost and barley straw that had been applied to our plot soil for many years.

Like so many fans of Erin's show, [Growing Floret](#), I became enthralled with the dahlia and the different forms, colors and sizes. As I started to follow commercial and back-yard dahlia growers on social media, it became clear that Dahlia Mania was a real phenomenon. It was so interesting to see how some people loved the pastel colored Cafe au Lait and others absolutely despised its less-than-ideal-color and less-than-ideal form. Obtaining the varieties I wanted for my new business, Dianne's Dahlias, would be a winter-long obsession. Thank goodness for [DAHLIAaddict](#) and for the two groups I quickly joined, the Colorado Dahlia Society and the American Dahlia Society.

"In my opinion, dahlias are the most giving plants for the amount of work we put in. When planted in a sunny spot of fertile soil with adequate water, they reward us with months of cut-and-come-again blooms." Kristine Albrecht, *Dahlias - Seed to Bloom*

Attending the ADS show last month hosted by the Portland Dahlia Society was a great experience for me and broadens my perspective as a new dahlia grower. For example, I was a little disappointed in the so-small size of my Elvira dahlia plant that was the first to bloom this season in my hoop house. However, at the show I learned that this dark pink micro peony form wins at the show more than any other peony and it had quite a few entries this year. By the way, the micro forms were a buzzy topic in workshops and side conversations at the show so you will probably see more about this form in the future. Think about attending the show next year as the North Central Washington Dahlia Society will host in Wenatchee in September 2024. I can't wait!



[Elvira from Dianne's Dahlia Garden](#)

One of the goals of ADS is to increase its membership through implementation of programs that appeal to the various dahlia interests including home gardeners, commercial growers and the gardening retailers. Another goal is to increase the visibility of the ADS especially those interested in gardening, cut flowers, commercial growing, and florists. By co-authoring the monthly Dahlia Talk I hope to help ADS with these goals by sharing my journey as a new commercial dahlia grower.

Martin Kral and I will switch authorship every month which should be a real treat to readers as Martin has over 53 years of growing dahlias and has been a contributing editor of Dahlias of Today since its inception in 1980. Being from Austria, Martin has international connections to the dahlia world that are sure to be a delight to read. Of course, always feel free to reach out to us with questions or dahlia topics of interest.

Dianne Reitan



Martin Kral and Dianne Reitan
at the 2023 ADS Show in Portland

American Dahlia Society

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