



The Evolving Dahlia Market

By Martin Král

Now that gathering new varieties is reaching its apex, dahlia growers focus on missing opportunities at club tuber sales, at the sharply reduced catalogs of dahlia vendors, and in a morose assessment of their own stock where sought-after growth eyes reveal themselves as just bumps on a tuber. For the lucky gardener with acreage, one tuber of a variety more or less does not matter. But for dahlia growers with more limited space, every plant is precious, so replacing a wayward variety becomes a pursuit of quickly disappearing opportunities for the season.

TUBER SALES

Often those rarities are found at club tuber sales, so collecting a 'wish list' is essential. (Just as important is taking along a current list of varieties already in one's possession to avoid buying more of what is in the inventory - an oversight I ruefully experienced more recently.) For most dahlia clubs the annual tuber sales enrich their treasury much more than membership dues. Excellent organization and proper pricing are in order, so clubs have recognized the critical features needed for such tasks.



Whatcom County DS tuber sale offers 700 varieties

One important aspect of holding such public sales is local media outreach. Marketing any product requires proper display, impeccable tubers, a desirable large selection, plus attractive packaging. A well-organized tuber sale (of 700 varieties, as seen here) allows buyers to make quick decisions for purchases. Most such tuber sales avoid offering varieties at different prices for that very good reason. A single price encourages the customer to choose among dahlias with certain attributes; price then becomes a secondary consideration – namely the buyer's wallet wealth.

There have been anecdotal reports that some newly-minted flower farmers swept into club tuber sales to purchase large lots of tubers, either for lucrative resale at much higher prices or to start commercial dahlia gardens with those inexpensive buys. Some clubs have established safeguards against these forays by limiting purchases to two or more tubers of a variety or by holding members-only sales ahead of their public sales. I can't yet tell if either approach prevents such undesirable consequences of the heated dahlia market. For certain, though, giving club members a discount is an advisable method of offering a special benefit to one's membership.

TRADEMARKS AND PATENTS

Much ruckus in the ranks of dahlia enthusiasts was made of the announcement by a couple of raisers who declared intentions to trademark their introductions and so demanded that royalties be paid for purchasing such named varieties. This exclusive aim runs contrary to customary practice of controlling their release at most for their first year of introduction. With a few exceptions, dahlia growers have avoided seeking legal protections for their own raisings. In that they mirror a general belief in the horticultural community that such efforts have limited utility, enforcement is haphazard at best.

For example, the Verwer Bros. of Lisse (Netherlands) had most of their introductions - the Karma, Gallery, Melody, etc. dahlia series - internationally trademarked and registered. Normally that would require that stock be purchased only from that firm, that royalties be paid, and that buyers promise not to propagate by tuber division or cuttings. What happened? Yes, Cees and Aad Verwer sold the nursery to Syngenta, Inc. But their once-trademarked dahlias appear in catalogs and on sales floors without even a TM designation, nor do resellers even give a hint of offering registered merchandise.



Karma dahlias on a shop display

To be sure, a trademark TM offers protection of a sort, but for a fee. It includes incontestability in America is valid for ten years, and it may be renewed. It has limited enforceability, so that trademark infringement actions require services of a specialist attorney. But a trademark protects only a plant's name, which can be contested. Many prominent plants so protected lost that identity: The famous Peace Rose was introduced as 'Madame M. Meilland', but the French introduction was quickly renamed once imported to the USA to commemorate the fall of Berlin in 1945. In the dahlia universe we have plenty of non-trademarked dahlias that were willfully renamed to suit a vendor's market aims: that's how Aloha became Bridgeview Aloha, Gordy Leroux' Kenora Macob B dropped the Kenora, and the Dutch Maxime is now found under several names in catalogs. Unlike a logo, plant names can be contested. Registering a plant may give raisers a higher degree of protection, but at some considerable cost: The application to the USPTO alone is \$240, then add a search fee, a plant issue fee, plus service fees. What do you get for this?

Well, a registered plant can bear the ® mark in all mentions, restricts propagation, and is valid for twenty years (but is not renewable). Violations of its provisions must be pursued in court. Exactly those are reasons why dahlia raisers up to now avoid seeking TM or registration protection. The veteran raiser of so many dahlias, Peter Haslhofer, explains: "Yes, someone suggested that I seek registration of my new varieties. When I looked it up, I saw one thing: This is a good deal - but only for lawyers! I can't spend my time running around in pursuit of violators to drag them before a judge." So Peter takes his chances and keeps his hard-earned money just the same.

Still interested?

Trademarking or registering of plants are covered by 35 U.S.C Plant Patents Law

<https://www.uspto.gov/patents>

Also these links:

<https://www.plantdelights.com/blogs/articles/name-that-plant?srltid=AfmBOoqu3YzNkT8yVUsZIT-sSIfJ8RhQRnjTVUQj2sXFvB9hzDIzgtuP>
<https://gpnmag.com/article/grower-101-demystifying-patents-and-trademarks/#:~:text=Trademark names are published in,to be used by anyone.>

CHICAGO

2025 AMERICAN DAHLIA SOCIETY & MIDWEST DAHLIA CONFERENCE
58TH NATIONAL SHOW

Graphics by Vida Wu

[Registration is open!](#)

Plan to join us September 18 - 22, 2025!

**Dahlia Talk Co-Authors
Martin Kral and Dianne Reitan
at the Rocky Reach Dam in Wenatchee, WA**



