

THE VIRUS-FREE GARDEN

by Robert Fakovec, Mid-Island Dahlia Society Member

I became interested in virus-free dahlias as I read about the studies done with them in the various articles in the ADS bulletins over the years. Last year we took advantage of the offer by the ADS to have some of our stock tested for virus. Following the directions, MIDS member Kathy Burke and I submitted a few leaves from our personal gardens and the club's stock plants. We were very interested to see if they were virus-free or not. The tubers that produced the foliage to be tested came from the club's previous year's stock.

In addition, this winter I started to work on the possibility of having MIDS participate in raising some virus-free plants in our garden in Eisenhower Park, East Meadow, Long Island, New York. This garden is both the Eastern Trail Garden and the club's display garden. While both gardens are in the same location, they have their own beds and tubers are not mixed. I made inquiries to various clubs and growers to see if they had any virus free varieties available. I was able to get help from Anthony (Tony) Evangelista of the Dahlia Society of Ohio. Tony very graciously offered to help us with the pursuit of this new goal. We were able to get the approval from MIDS for the project and a small budget to start it.

Because this was a new adventure for all of us, we worked closely with Tony, who coordinated with Mike Weber on each step of the process. In the early spring we obtained a list of the dahlias that would be available to us, and in May, we made our choices. Mike mailed cuttings of these varieties to us via USPS priority mail. They arrived safe and sound due to the excellent packaging by Tony.

I let them harden off for two (2) weeks, per Tony's good advice. I was able to protect them from some nasty bit of cold and rainy weather that we had on Long Island.

They were planted in their exclusive virus-free bed where procedures were posted, directing the cleaning and washing of all tools after working on a single plant.



Figure 1 – Cuttings Arrive



Figure 2 – Keep it clean

Signage was purchased, detailing this on both ends of the beds.



Figure 3 – Washing station

A washing and cleaning station was setup for any hand tools used on them. With these practices in place and the excellent stock from the Dahlia Society of Ohio, we hope to successfully grow and complete our first year with this experiment so we can expand it further in 2022. Again a special thanks to the Dahlia Society of Ohio, Tony Evangelista and the members of the Mid Island Dahlia Society who made this new endeavor possible.