

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 7-20-05) "Dahlia Show" © 2005

If you've always enjoyed dahlias and wanted to maybe grow some yourself then the 81st Annual Kitsap County Dahlia Society Show at the Kitsap County Fairgrounds Saturday August 6 from 1:00 to 6:00 p.m. and Sunday August 7 from noon to 4:00 p.m. is the event for you. And, it's completely free.

For dahlia collectors this local dahlia show is the culmination of their efforts to create or grow just the right dahlia. The fruits of their labors will be on display the weekend of August 6 and 7 at President's Hall at the Fairgrounds. You'll want to attend and be thrilled and tantalized by the abundant colors, shapes and varieties of dahlias on display that day. In addition members of the Kitsap County Dahlia Society will be on hand to answer all your questions about growing dahlias. You can bring that "unnamed dahlia" to them for identification.

If you can't attend the show the KCDS has a wonderful display of dahlias at the Silverdale Post Office. Dahlia society members plant and maintain this display every year. Information sheets on the Kitsap County Dahlia Society and on growing dahlias are available at the Silverdale Post Office dahlia display site. You may even be tempted to attend one of their monthly meetings held the third Thursday of every month (except July and August). The society meets for a picnic in July and their show is held every August. All events are open to the public.

I visited their website at www.kitsapdahlias.org. The site lists the meeting dates and topics, plus much more. Nearly every January the meeting is a slide show of the newest dahlia selections. Most members rush home to order their tubers that night. Meetings are held at the Crystal Grange on Paulson Road in Brownsville. You'll also find six links to abundant information and photos on dahlias. For more information on the club and its activities call club President Wanda Novak at 692-4829 or send a note to KCDS, PO Box 502, Silverdale WA 98383-0502.

Spanish explorer Andreas Dahl (hence the name) brought the dahlia tubers from Mexico to Spain at the turn of the 18th Century. The tubers were harvested for food. But by 1815 the Belgians were growing them for sale and dahlias were being collected throughout Europe to ornament the gardens.

The Kitsap County Dahlia Society was formed in 1923 and dues were fifty cents. The group has been meeting continuously ever since and now the dues are still a bargain at \$8 per year. Club member Jim Sibon who notified me about the show began growing dahlias a few years ago. Jim and his wife Pat were in Yuma, Arizona where they were smitten by the dahlias grown there. Jim called a friend who grew dahlias in Tacoma for information. By the time Jim and Patty returned home the friend had planted about two dozen plants. "We've been growing them ever since," says Jim. I asked the Sibons for their favorite dahlias out of their current 175 plants. "We really like 'Black Spider' (dark red), 'Sparticus' (red), 'Fidalgo Snow' (white), 'Peach Blend' (peach) and Chimacum Topaz (propagated by Leona and Dave Smith of Chimacum)," Jim and Patty said.

This year's club president Wanda Novak has been growing dahlias for about twenty years. I asked her favorite and she said, "It changes daily." She explained that every bloom is more beautiful than the last "That's what hooks a lot of us. It's a sickness but a good sickness." Wanda, Jim and the other members of the Kitsap County Dahlia Society hope you'll come luxuriate in the incredible variety of the dahlias they've grown in our county. They're also waiting to help you learn more about growing dahlias in your own garden.

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