

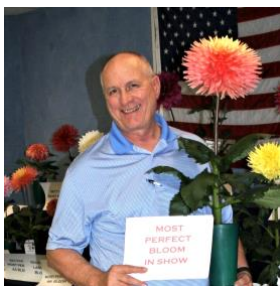
September Ask the Experts: Let's Go to the Show!

Last month we asked our experts Jim Kassner and Rusty Richie for their best tips on preparing and grooming dahlias for show. This month it's showtime! **CSDS's 91st Annual Show** will take place in about two weeks - September 16 and 17 at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Our experts are once again tapping into their years of experience in showing dahlias to share some of their best "day of" practices.

This month's background question is **"If you had to pick one, which dahlia are you most excited to show this year?"**



2022 CSDS Dahlia Show - Photo credit: Vida Wu



Jim Kassner: Bryn Terfel, Aggie White, Louie White...any of these monsters or Sir Alf Ramsey.



Rusty Richie: I really don't have a particular variety that I am excited about showing.

Some varieties are like family, and I hate to leave them at home, but if they aren't at their peak for the show, they may miss that season. I like to show blooms that are at their best. If I set a goal for a show, it's usually a sweepstakes (earning the most points in a section). I grow lots of varieties that are tried and true, and I always hope most of them are able to go to a show.

What supplies should be in every exhibitor's tool kit?

In Jim Kassner's kit:

- Clippers
- Razor knife
- Tweezers
- Spray bottle with canola oil (to clean leaves)
- Shallow tray (like a cookie sheet to prevent water from spilling when cutting oasis)
- Show tags*
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Paper towels

*To save time and to be better organized on show day, Jim prefers to have his show tags prepped in advance. He credits his wife Debbe for supporting him in all things dahlia such as prepping show tags as well as making almost 1000 name tags for his blooms this season. Debbe has also participated and won awards in the floral design section of past shows and is currently a candidate judge, studying to be an accredited judge. Among her long list of accomplishments in the dahlia world, Debbe has clerked about 30 shows all over the country! (I think she might be a bit overqualified to prep show tags!)

In Rusty Richie's kit:

- Cutting board
- Knife
- Spray bottle
- Paper towels
- Band-aids
- Pens
- Address labels
- Show tags
- ADS Classification book
- Show program

And if you are judging:

- Calipers
- Measuring tape
- Color guide
- Composite classification book
- Flask
- Sense of humor



Sample show tag. Photo credit: Vida Wu



Rusty and Anita's garden blooms awaiting their debut during show season. Photo credit: Rusty and Anita Ritchie

What considerations or strategies do you take into account when deciding what category to enter your blooms?

Rusty Ritchie: I consider a dahlia show to be an exhibition more than a competition. I like to bring one of everything, and those require no strategy or decision making. Multiple bloom entries take a little more effort and thought, but they make a bigger impression on the visitors to the show. Multiple bloom entries are where shows often differ. In Elkhart, any variety can be entered as a single bloom, or a group of three, five, or ten. In

Chicago, the numbers are different. (CSDS has a single, three, six and ten grouping and a special "Four Formation" section among other categories.)

Jim Kassner: Absolutely there are many reasons to enter other parts of the show. It does take some strategy coupled with experience and some thoughts on what you decide to plant in spring. I entered 100 blooms at Central States with most going to Section E ("open to all exhibitors"). There were duplicates of blooms that could have been entered as "triples". I did enter three sets of triples, in three different sections and won all three: "Best Triple Miniature," "Best Triple A," and "Best Triple AA". Those were entered in Sections G ("Miniatures"), and the other two were both from Section I ("Three of a Kind").

Section J would be nice to enter with six different AA/A or B or BB staged in separate vases. I have entered Section K ("Ten Single Bloom Entries") in the past. It requires ten AA/A or B or BB all staged in separate vases. Section M ("Four Formations") is four AA/A or B or BB - one of each of the six possible formations.

Section V ("Multiple Bloom Classes Open") is for the same varieties in a common vase in the amount of 5, 10, or 20. Entering in the multiples sections takes more effort, experience and overall knowledge.

I was disappointed in myself for not doing more multiples last year.

My last thoughts are on becoming a better exhibitor. I scored 180 points in my section, almost double of what it takes to win any section, so I should have planned better to enter other sections.

What are judges looking for in an award-worthy bloom?

Rusty Ritchie: If you are bringing blooms to show, cut the stem long enough that you have one or two sets of foliage. If you have a beautiful bloom and no foliage, there are shows and judges that will treat your entry rudely, as though you should have left it at home. I disagree with any disqualifications or downgrades for blooms that are fresh and



Laura Matz's award-winning "Three of a Kind" of AC MP. Photo credit: Vida Wu



Jim Kassner's award-winning three-bloom entry of Clearview Edie. Photo credit: Vida Wu

pleasing to the eye. The judges will send only the best entries to the 'Court of Honor'. The blooms that make it to the top usually have nice foliage and sturdy stems, not to mention striking blooms that have great symmetry and little or no bug damage.

Jim Kassner: There are charts for trial garden and bench trial blooms that could give an idea of what a judge might want to see. A dahlia should be true to form. A "Formal Decorative" dahlia for example should conform to the standards for a dahlia of that classification. (*For more details see [Dahlia Form and Sizes](#) from the American Dahlia Society website.*)

Color is also important - it should not be streaky or faded. The petals should be full and not droopy. The foliage should be clean and proportional to the bloom. You do not want a giant bloom with alligator arms (short and skinny) but rather proportioned like a pyramid where the leaves spread in a pleasant presentation. The first pair of leaves is mandatory. Often, I leave two sets of leaves on a lot of my blooms and about 12 to 16 inches of stem, but the second pair of leaves is not required.

The stem should be straight from the first pair of laterals and up. The bloom position should be 45 degrees atop the stem. For balls, poms and minis the judges are not as harsh on bloom position. Overall, the bloom should have a striking presentation.

The difference between judging for a trial garden versus for a show, is at a trial garden, a new variety is being judged on its own merits but at a show, a judge is looking at multiple blooms of the same variety. Your bloom will be compared to the same variety or other similar varieties in the same section.



TIPS FOR SHOWING DAHLIAS

September 16 - 17, 2023 • Chicago Botanic Garden



1. READ THE RULES

CSDS prints a booklet of official show rules with info on eligibility, sections for entries and awards.

2. GROW GREAT BLOOMS

Top, disbud, disbranch and time your dahlias for peak bloom at show time. Pick strong, healthy, pest free blooms true to form, color and size.



3. CUT AND PREP

Cut evening before or early morning on day of show. Keep at least 1 set of leaves. Keep cool and secure in transport buckets.



4. PACK A TOOLKIT

Cutting tools, cutting board, shallow tray, tweezers, paper towels, canola oil, spray bottle, pens, show tags, ADS Classification book



5. STAGE YOUR BLOOMS

Secure bloom in vase. Check foliage and use canola oil to clean leaves. Mist if needed. Tag and place on section exhibition table by 10am.

for more show-winning tips check out

**CENTRAL STATES DAHLIA SOCIETY NEWS-LINE
"ASK THE EXPERTS"**

www.centralstatesdahliasociety.com

A handy dandy summary of our experts' best tips! Graphic and photo credit: Vida Wu

What tips do you have for actual staging of your bloom?

Rusty Ritchie:

- When staging your blooms, use the tools at hand to make sure your bloom is secure in the container.
- Wedges can help keep your bloom upright.
- Recutting the stem can help if the bloom seems to be getting wimpy.
- Misting the bloom lightly - and foliage too - can help it stay fresh.

Jim Kassner:

- Select a vase with oasis and water. Choose a vase appropriate for the size of the bloom.
- Insert the bloom with the bloom facing you. Make sure the stalk is straight and not leaning.
- Examine the foliage. Clean the foliage with water and canola oil. Decide if one, two or three sets of laterals (leaves) improves the overall appearance of the bloom. Triangulate from the top of the bloom to the outside edges of the foliage. If the foliage is overpowering the bloom, you should remove the extra foliage and leave the mandatory single set of laterals.
- Place the show tag to hide any conspicuous wedges of oasis you may have used or any unsightly parts of the stalk.
- Confirm where to place your bloom. Refer to the [ADS Online Classification Guide \(OCG\)](#) or printed handbook version to look up the cultivar's four digit number to pinpoint where the bloom should be placed.
 - For example the cultivar "Hollyhill Big Red" has a class number of #0207
 - "0" means size AA, "2" means the form is semi-cactus, "07" means the color is Dark red
 - There will be a tag on the "W Section" (Novice) Table stating "0200-15" to help you find the proper location. There should be blooms similar to yours on the table which will give you an idea if you are in the right place.
 - Ask questions of others around you. Everybody is there to assist and appreciates your efforts to exhibit.
- If possible, attend a show prior to entering for some in-person experience or inquire about having a "buddy volunteer" to guide you along.

Thank you again to Jim and Rusty for encouraging CSDS members to exhibit at this year's shows! Best of luck to everyone who plans to show this year and happy growing to all!

Column edited by Vida Wu