



Exhibiting Dahlias: How to Get Started

Exhibiting your dahlias in shows will truly enhance your favorite hobby. The camaraderie among exhibitors is strong and you will soon be growing even better dahlias. You compete against growers with similar experience in novice, amateur, or open categories.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

Here are the items you'll need to get started:

- **Exhibition containers must be black.** These can range from painted juice cans to various drinking glasses and vases to exhibition containers sold just for exhibiting dahlias. There will be examples at the July PSDA meeting.
- **Staging material.** This is floral foam that you put in the exhibition containers to hold your blooms upright.
- **Entry tags.** These will be available at the July PSDA meeting. Junior exhibitors use blue; Novice use pink; amateurs use yellow; open (experienced) exhibitors use white.
- **Show schedule.** If you join the Federation of NW Dahlia Growers you will receive one as part of your membership. If you are not a member, you can find schedules for each show on the Federation website www.nwdahlia.org
- **Exhibitor Number.** If you are a Federation member you will be assigned an exhibitor number that is good at all Federation shows (which includes Puget Sound Dahlia Association). If you are not a Federation member, you will be assigned a number at each show when you arrive.
- **Classification Book.** Officially, the American Dahlia Society (ADS) *Classification and Handbook of Dahlias*. You will automatically receive this publication if you are a member of the ADS. Otherwise go online to www.dahlia.org/ and click on ADS Store.
- **FloraLife.** This is a product that enhances a cut flower's life. It is not a requirement, but many dahlia exhibitors use it.

ORGANIZATIONS

Most exhibitors find it useful to belong to at least one local society as well as the regional and national organizations.

- **Puget Sound Dahlia Association** – visit <https://www.pugetsounddahlias.com/join/> for membership information.
- **Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers** – publishes show schedules for 11 local societies (in its *Dahlia Annual*) and assigns exhibition numbers. Visit <http://www.nwdahlia.org> for membership information.
- **American Dahlia Society** – publishes a quarterly *Bulletin* as well as the *Classification and Handbook of Dahlias*. Go online to <http://www.dahlia.org/> for membership information.

CULTURE

Good growing techniques are paramount for successful exhibiting. Ensure that your dahlias are properly fertilized and watered, so they grow to the proper size and have good color. Dahlias must be exhibited with at least one pair of leaves, so disbudding is essential. Many serious exhibitors even place umbrellas over blooms that tend to fade.

CUTTING DAHLIAS FOR A SHOW

Most exhibitors pick their blooms early in the morning on the day before a show. The blooms are usually then left in a cool, dark room for several hours before staging. Some dahlias — for example open-centered varieties — may be best if cut the night before a show so they don't drop petals. These techniques will be learned through experience.

STAGING YOUR BLOOMS

'Staging' is simply putting your dahlias in the exhibition containers. Stuff the containers full of floral foam and fill with water; some serious exhibitors add FloraLife to the water. Use a sharpened dowel to drive a vertical hole into the foam so you don't break the stem when you insert the dahlia. Cut an inch or so from the bottom of the stem before placing it in the foam to ensure the flower can drink; stems left in the air can quickly seal, resulting in an exhibit that wilts. Attach entry tag with one of those throwaway *plastic* coffee stir sticks stuck in the floral foam.

ENTRY TAGS

Each entry will need an entry tag.

The diagram shows a form for the Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers. It includes fields for Section, Class, Dahlia Name, Dahlia Number, Exhibitor's Number, and Exhibitor's Name. Callout boxes provide additional information for each field:

- Section:** Section is from the Federation show schedule; class if from the ADS *Classification and Handbook of Dahlias*.
- Dahlia Name:** The dahlia name; you **must** know the name to exhibit it.
- Dahlia Number:** From the ADS *Classification and Handbook of Dahlias*.
- Exhibitor's Number:** Your exhibitor number – if you are a Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers member you will be assigned a number. If you aren't a Federation member, you can ask for a number at each show in which you exhibit.
- Exhibitor's Name:** Your name here.

The form also includes checkboxes for 1st, 2nd, Best of Type, and Section, and a note at the bottom: "Fold on line and tuck under lip to conceal your name".

TRANSPORTING YOUR BLOOMS

Getting your staged entries to the dahlia show is always a challenge. Many exhibitors firmly secure their entries in milk crates; some even attach dowels to the stems to ensure they arrive safely. When you enter your first show, watch the other exhibitors to get ideas. There will also be suggestions at the July PSDA meeting.

Make sure you give yourself plenty of time to get your entries out of your car and onto the exhibition tables. The Federation *Dahlia Annual* and Federation website have entry times.

HELP CLERK OR HANG RIBBONS

The show officials can always use help. Ask one of the veterans to direct you to the judges' chairman; introduce yourself and offer to clerk or hang ribbons. You will be assigned to a judging team and will be able to listen to the judges make their decisions. This is a wonderful learning experience. If you are assigned to clerk, you will record the winners on a form.