

DSO 30 — Virus 0

In the late summer of 2015, members of the Dahlia Society of Ohio (DSO) gathered leaves from a number of plants in our gardens and sent them to Washington State University (WSU) for virus testing. Those initial tests were inspired by ongoing virus research activities by Professor Hanu Pappu at WSU and by donations by the Scheetz-Chuey Foundation to support that research. The results of those initial field tests showed at least two important things: not all dahlias have virus and all of us had some virus in our gardens.

Every season since then, the DSO has invested the \$300 required to test 30 plants. Tony Evangelista has supported and shepherded the DSO program from the outset. This year, all of the 30 samples came from his garden—and the results were wonderful. There was no virus detected in the samples he sent for testing! The “score” was actually 36 to 0; he sent a few extras for testing.

The objective from the outset has been to provide clean stock for the DSO auctions and, more recently, the Midwest Conference auction. We have not yet achieved 100% clean stock for the auctions, but the portion of clean plants has increased every year. Perhaps the key point for other clubs and for dahlia suppliers is that those clean tubers and plants brought prices that greatly exceeded the \$300 investment.

In the early years, Doc Hemminger managed the plant propagation process at facilities graciously provided by Willoway Nurseries. Since Doc’s too-early passing, Mike Weber and a team of volunteers have taken over the process. They have produced literally hundreds of Gx (tested and found to be free of virus every year for x years) plants

over the last several years.

Those plants have provided a hard-to-find clean starting point for DSO and Midwest Conference member gardens. That starting point is not sufficient to achieve the result that Tony achieved this year. Everyone (at least almost everyone) has some virus in their garden. That virus is readily transferred from those infected plants to its clean neighbors if cutting tools are not disinfected between working on the plants. Tony has used all three approaches to disinfect his tools. He now uses a combination of dipping his tools in a 10% bleach solution, followed by a dip in the recommended detergent solution. Each of the approaches have been described in the ADS virus brochure and in previous Bulletin articles. They are all available on the ADS website, dahlia.org. The bottom line is that you need to add “Clean Between” to your “If in Doubt, Throw It Out” mantra!

Even after we succeed in becoming part of the solution (rather than a big part) of the problem, we will need to do a better job of avoiding the thrips that can transfer virus from plant to plant and from the neighboring weeds to our dahlias.

A number of other local ADS societies have participated in the special program for half-price testing this year. It is unlikely that others will accomplish a “score” of 30 to 0 in their first year of testing. Their effort will, nevertheless, provide some clean stock for next year’s tuber and plant sales. With the ongoing support of Professor Pappu and the WSU team and with the financial support of Jim Chuey and the Scheetz-Chuey Foundation, we hope to be able to continue the programs into 2020. Watch for those announcements in future ADS Bulletins.