

Abbie's October 2024 Dahlia Update



Dahlias are adored and admired. At the Hardwick Farmers Market, my glass jars of dahlias capture attention and buying interest of people passing by. I end up with happy hand exchanges of dahlias for dollars.

My childhood love for growing dahlias was reinvigorated by a tour of Frog Hollow Dahlia Farm in Hubbardston. Stan drove me there on his motorcycle on a warm and sunny weekend in late September 2021. The owner, Melissa Morris, impressed me profoundly with her extensive beautiful and unusual varieties. All were available for cutting for making your own bouquets. Melissa explained new terms for my plant lexicon such as collarette, incurved cactus, and formal decorative. Seeing blooms of varietal names such as Ketchup & Mustard, Waltzing Mathilda, and KoKo Puff, was fascinating and inspiring. I followed up with reading Melissa's informative website and vowed that I would try to grow some of her favorite dahlia varieties.

What I value highly with Melissa's growing practices is her avoidance of pesticides, fungicides, herbicides, and chemical fertilizers. Her donkey provides manure for plant food. With white dahlias being more prone to Japanese beetle chewing, this petal color is not common in her collection. Living on the edge of protected forest land leads to her acceptance and appreciation of the wildlife community. She finds that her dahlia beds are resilient and regenerative after destruction by nearby bears. I adore her images showing dahlia blooms as resting places for tiny frogs. I hope that her growing practices will influence more flower growers to work in harmony with natural environments to benefit the soil, pollinators, and wild animals.

I participated in Melissa's online auction event in the spring. Little did I know that close to 100% of her tubers would be sold within five minutes of the auction opening time to very competitive buyers. Dahlias are madly popular! However, I ended up with some fine selections. Upon pickup, Melissa gifted me graciously a couple of extra varieties.

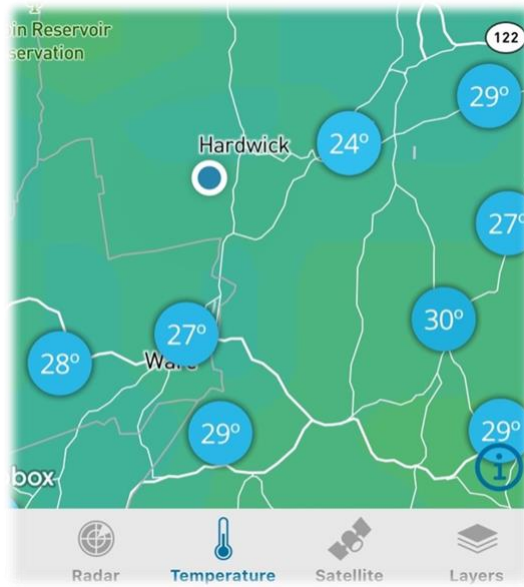
My present dedication to dahlias can be considered extreme and eccentric. Yes, this month I have given up several hours of sleep. Yes, I have sacrificed time and energy with dahlia care on cold nights at the expense of having energy to take my charming two-year old granddaughter. I have explained that Grandma was tired and needed to take a rest instead of a healthy outdoor walk with a stroller to the neighborhood playground. Yes, I have pleaded with my husband to take over my dahlia vigil on a cold morning so that I can arrive in Burlington, MA by 8 AM for babysitting duty.

Of all the stressful issues and strife present on our planet, high on my list of worries was the weather. The long-range forecast began to make me anxious about being able to display my garden flowers on the altar at Trinity Episcopal Church for October 20th. I have always been amazed at how dahlias flourish in the fall. I grieve when killing frosts cut the performance short. With a prediction for freezing temperatures for the evening of October 16th, I acted with set up and testing of a rotating sprinkler in my main dahlia garden. With the hose turned on full volume, every single precious dahlia plant received a full spray of water every minute continuously. Some gardeners questioned why I did not cover the plants instead of spraying with water. I explained that fabric covers bend and break stems. Also, warm water sourced from well at 45F provides more effective prevention of frost damage.

My entire region has been in a severe drought for the past few weeks. The weather has reminded me of Southern California with pure blue cloudless skies and low humidity. At night the temperature drops dramatically like that of Death Valley. I knew my dahlias were in trouble around 11 PM on October 16th after looking at a weather app. I got out of bed and dressed in winter clothes with insulated boots, a thick jacket, warm hat, and ski gloves. I turned on the water sprinkler for the main dahlia bed. For other dahlias I filled pails and splashed water all over the plants. I

was outside doing the splashing an water spray water method at least every hour until 8:00 AM.

7:04 AM October 17th Local Temperature Readings



Horrified and dismayed by the amount of ice coating the foliage and flowers such as shown with **Pooh** at 7:30 AM with air at about 25F.



Icicles and ice sheets on **Glamour Pink** at 7:30 AM



Parakeet icicles 8:46 AM



Amazingly, all ice melted around 9 AM and most of the dahlias looked fine. Foliage and flowers not protected with ice layers turned brown. I repeated the water spraying treatments for the following two days where temperatures dipped into the upper 20s in the early morning. On Saturday October 19th, my friend and I picked dozens of high-quality flowers for church and the Hardwick Farmers Market. My altar arrangements were much appreciated at the Sunday service.



As of October 26th, these dahlias are still thriving and looking fabulous. I love taking photos of these beauties. A great dahlia with enormous numbers of blooms is the lovely pale-yellow **Parakeet** variety.



I have enjoyed growing the large and variable pink **Jersey Beauty** since 2016.



This impressive yellow tinged with purple Wyn's New Pastel came from Frog Hollow Dahlia Farm in 2022.



Glorious, exuberant, and abundant **Hillside Suffusion Pompon** from my sister



The lovely, prized, and proud **Glamour Pink** from my sister



The beautiful and revered **Café Au Lait** from my sister



The pretty and delicate late bloomer **Labryrith** from my sister



The eye catching and charming collarette **Pooh** from my sister



As seen with **Pooh**, dahlia blooms provide food, refuge, and comfort to many bumblebees. Often each flower is an overnight bed for as many as six bees. Check out these **Parakeet** flowers with bumblebees on October 21st.



I do not know the varietal name of this prolific red dahlia. This dahlia has thrived every year since 2016. It is an easy keeper. I have gifted tubers to many neighbors and friends. My Mount Holyoke College classmates, from all over the country at our 40th reunion in 2022 enjoyed these tubers very much. Red is our MHC class color.



In summary, 2024 has been a glorious year for dahlias. In early spring I battled tuber damage from jumping worms and voles. However, once the plants were established, I had no problems. I watered deeply during the summer and fall drought periods. As always, staking was very important. Throughout the season, I used baling twine to secure branches to prevent breakage and damage from winds and the heavy weight of multiple flowers.

Feel free to reach out to me with requests for dahlia tubers for 2025. Most of my collection was given to me and has multiplied well in my garden. I want to give excess tubers to you for your growing pleasure.

