



# hortie

## Growing Dahlias with a Passion

by Jeff Gustin

To grow great dahlias you have to have a passion. To grow a successful business you need teamwork. The success of Swan Island Dahlias can be attributed to both. That passion and teamwork is evident when you meet Nick and Ted Gitts, the two brothers that are co-owners of the business, and our Horties of the month.

It's with this passion that the Gitts family has built their business becoming the largest grower of dahlias in the nation, but they didn't start as flower growers. Their dad, Nick Sr., was a dairy farmer in Washington State and was growing dahlias as a hobby with his wife. They were approached by the McCarter's who were the owners of Swan Island Dahlias at the time. Swan Island Dahlias was started in Portland in the 1920's with part of the facilities located on Swan Island, hence the name. When offered the dahlia business in 1963, Nick Senior jumped at the chance to buy it, but the boys were not too happy to be leaving their friends and moving to Canby! After high school, Ted went to work in a mill and Nick bought a pet store, but a family meeting brought them back to the farm, and eventually they bought the farm from their folks. Their parents stayed active in the farm well into retirement. Now, the 3rd generation of family members is working in the business.



The dahlia business has changed quite a bit since they first bought the farm. Cut flowers are a big part of the business, as people look to add the magnificent color of dahlias to their weddings and other events. In fact, the day we were there, they were shipping a huge order to Alaska. The biggest part of the business is still the retailing of tubers to gardeners around the world.



Why the popularity of these late summer bloomers? Nick says it is because they are so easy to grow. You can plant them and pretty much forget them. They also are one of the longest blooming plants in the garden. You can get new blooms from July through November if the weather cooperates. There is also the diversity of the bloom types. From single collarettes, to the cactus types and the Pom Poms, you would be hard pressed to find more diversity in a bloom. To see these plants in all their glory you should stop by the Swan Island Dahlias, Annual Dahlia Festival. It runs August 29th, 30th, 31st & September 5th, 6th, 7th. They offer over 40 acres of plants in bloom and

you can stroll the fields to personally check out all the varieties. Plus, during the two weekends of the festival you can view over 400 spectacular floral arrangements inside their two display rooms.

The Gitts brothers are not just growers; they are also hybridizers of new varieties. Gitts Perfection, Gitts Attention and Gitts Respect are all obvious children of their hybridizing program. Their new varieties have won the prestigious Darrell Hart award more than a half a dozen times. They are always looking for the newest color and style to offer, so you have a better, more beautiful flower in your garden. If you get a chance stop by the field and see the wonderful color. The fields are open from August 1st through September. But the best time to go is during the Annual Dahlia Festival. For more information about dahlias and the Gitts family, check out their website [www.Dahlias.com](http://www.Dahlias.com).