

ALONG AZALEA ROW

By Helen Dempsey

"But Dahlias Are Our Favorites"

Brookings, already noted for its Azaleas and Lilies could easily add to the list Dahlias. The Lily fields are heavenly to see, but soon gone, and the Azaleas are a pink cloud over the hillsides for a somewhat longer period. But Dahlias could set our Brookings gardens ablaze from July until frost, when tourist travel is heavy.

Growing good Dahlias is much easier than most any other flower we have, from tubers, plants or seeds. If you plant specials, of course the commercial growers put out fine catalogs with interesting descriptions and pictures, or you can visit their grounds and choose for the coming year. Once you let it be known you want Dahlias, your friends will come forth with additions to your garden. For like the Bible story of the loaves and fishes, the more they are divided the more roots they provide, until they could feed the masses with their beauty.

The person who says: "Oh, I wouldn't plant Dahlias. They are too coarse!" has never looked at Dahlias — in the plural. True enough, the huge show blooms are rather stiff and do not lend themselves to other than a large planting. However there are dainty miniatures in all the types and the most delectable colors; and sweet little pompons that resemble colored globes of honeycomb.

Many Dahlias make well-shaped plants 2 to 4 feet tall and about as wide. Placed in groups or singly in a large border or against shrubbery or a hedge, they are most effective and colorful when the shrubs are past their blooming and just a mass of green.

The title "But Dahlias Are Our Favorites" I have stolen from an article in January Gardening by Jean Moore. She tells how Roses are their hobby, and how they work all year mulching, fertilizing, dusting and spraying, then in midsummer relax in lawn chairs and feast their eyes on their really favorite flower, the Dahlia. This struck me so forcefully because it was so like our own experience. Before moving to Brookings we had a planting of about 70 roses. We loved them and worked with them. Then we started experimenting with Dahlias. As Mrs. Moore points out: "Unlike Roses, Dahlias need very little care." We would regret the necessity of having a garden without Roses and a dozen other flowers we love. Still, Dahlias are our favorites. Also, Dahlia grow-

ing is my personal hobby.

There are as many ways and times for planting as there are growers, but it stands to reason that what would bring good results in Michigan or Texas might not be the best practice here. In this area I like to start early in the year, from late February to early April, usually, always in a sunny location. Should your ground be heavy, later planting might be indicated. We have been fortunate in having soil that drains well, therefore are not forced to dig tubers in fall and store over winter. Since Dahlia tubers are bulky, this is a big help. We dig, divide and plant back immediately, and even sometimes leave clumps two or three years without dividing. This would not be advisable should you want choicest show blooms, or if your ground holds water.

Spacing is regulated according to the gardener's taste, and the growing habits of the individual Dahlia. Most should have at least two to three feet each way. In the mixed border it usually gives a better effect to use several of one color or tone in a grouping rather than mixing too many colors.

We dig a hole 8 to 10 inches deep and wide enough to accommodate the tubers, work in a spade of well rotted manure or compost, or a handful of complete fertilizer. The tuber is laid flat, with eye up. We sometimes use two or three tubers with necks pointing to center of hill, when we have them, cover lightly with an inch or so of soil, gradually drawing in the balance of the earth as the plants grow. This gives quicker growth and takes care of cultivating against small weeds, but does not make for a tidy garden. Planting thus they benefit by the sun early in growth and the roots are down where they are cool and moist in the summer and do not require such frequent watering. A side dressing of fertilizer is beneficial as the buds are forming, and sometimes we give them a boost as late as

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July 15th, especially when we are preparing flowers for fall shows. This year we will experiment with foliar feeding.

Two of the most common causes of failure to have a long blooming period are failure to keep the plants growing until full size is reached, and not keeping the old flowers snipped off, the last really the most important. Disbudding is necessary if you wish to enter Dahlias in the shows, and desirous if you want larger blooms with sturdy long stems. The smaller types do not require it.

Growing Dahlias from seeds is no more difficult than growing Marigolds or Zinnias. Seeds planted early in a sunny window and set out in the garden when true leaves are formed, will bloom the same year and make good tubers. It is well to cover with hotcaps, and place a little slug bait under it as added precaution, unless you have done a good job of general garden baiting.

It is always a period of suspense until the first blooms appear. Of several hundred Dahlias I have grown from seed I remember only two that were exactly alike. Since fertility is about 90 percent with most seed from reliable sources,

anyone can add as many Dahlias as they have the time and space to grow. Of course you may get anything from tiny singles to fully double dinnerplate sizes. Bedding Dahlias are mostly singles and semi-doubles, small or medium size, but they do bloom sooner and continue till frost.

Do not be disappointed if you buy a package of Dahlia seed of a given type and then find they do not run true. Unless you pay a very high price for hand-pollinated seed, the bees have crossed a large variety of colors and sizes and anything can come of it. This is the way the new varieties come about, and there is always the chance that you have the

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lucky number and find one that the judges will consider especially good and worthy of introducing. This will be your own introduction and you can name it as you choose. I have two at the trial gardens this year, a little red and white formal decorative Bi-color to be named for my mother, "Flora Gifford," and a yellow semi-cactus to be called "Bright Jewel." Whether they prove worthy or not, ISN'T GARDENING FUN!

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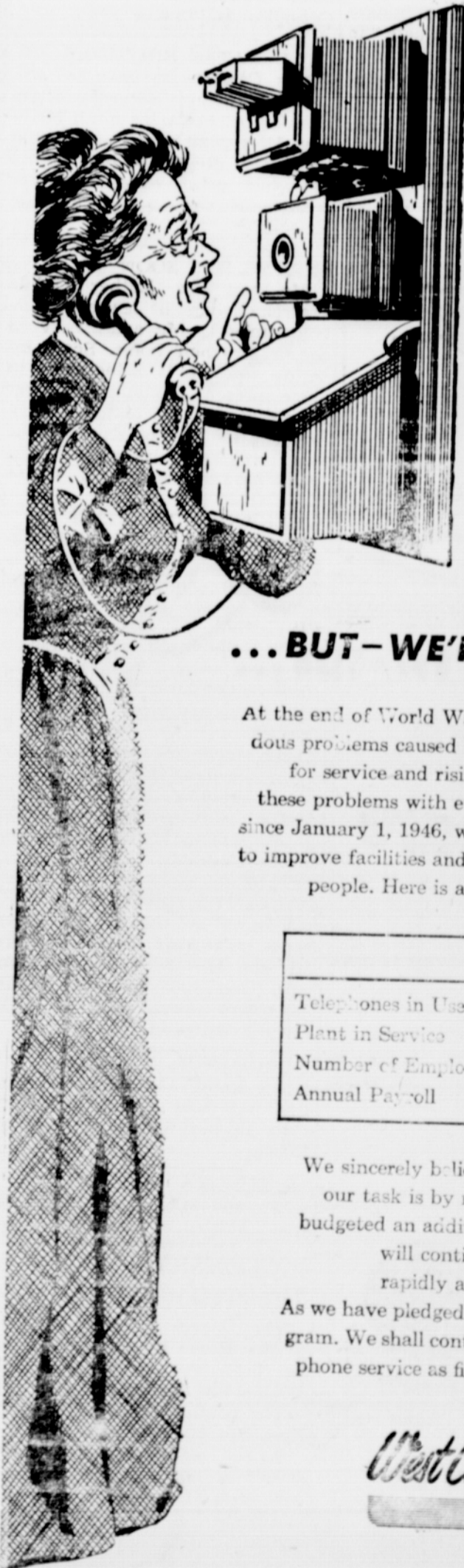
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Number of Employees	635	1,546	1,620
Annual Payroll	\$1,658,949	\$4,734,399	\$5,203,543

We sincerely believe we have come a long way, but we know our task is by no means finished. This year, 1954, we have budgeted an additional \$6,300,000 for more construction. We will continue to improve and expand our facilities as rapidly as our earnings and available capital permit. As we have pledged to you, we will continue our expansion program. We shall continue to provide all our subscribers with telephone service as fine as that available anywhere in the nation.

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