

COMPASS

GARDEN: CYNTHIA KLING

The Dahlia Lama Speaks

Just as the season begins to turn and that first chilly wind hits, these bodaciously brilliant blooms arrive for summer's last hurrah. Anyone who has been nursing their dahlias since late May, as I have, knows how exciting this moment is.

To celebrate I called the Dahlia Lama, Frances Palmer, a celebrated Connecticut artist known for her handmade ceramic pieces and her love of this flower. At her Weston home she grows hundreds in two cutting gardens, while in the barn, she makes vases for them that are collected by everyone from art connoisseurs to flower lovers and pottery buffs. Her Instagram feed (59,000 followers) showcases her daily arrangements in shades and combinations you've only dreamt of. Palmer's vases, which range in price from \$195 to \$2,500, can be found at ritzy shops like the Neue Gallery in New York City and 100 Main — Bunny Williams' new store in Falls Village.

Cynthia Kling: To give us a sense of your garden, how many dahlias do you grow?

Frances Palmer: I don't really count but maybe around 450. I am always

trying new ones.

CK: What's new this year?

FP: From Swan Island (www.dahlias.com) I ordered Checkers, Frank Holmes, Tahoma, Moonshot, Papageno, Poodle Skirt, Irish Glow, KA's Cloud, Drama Queen. From Old House Gardens (oldhousegardens.com) Golden Heart and Requiem.

CK: Whoa nelly, nice. When adding to your collection, what are you looking for?

FP: I choose by color — new pinks, new yellows — and by forms — very small, very large, something that will look great in a bouquet. I am always thinking about shapes and colors.

CK: Tell me three dahlias you couldn't live without?

FP: Clyde's Choice (bronzy and gold), Jane Cowl (orange undulating petals) and Juanita (velvety ruby petals).

CK: Tell me how you begin an arrangement.

FP: I start by cutting things to go in the vase, like hydrangeas, viburnum, bittersweet, even branches I find on the side of the road, that will hold the stems in place and support the blooms.

CK: I love catching



PHOTO BY FRANCES PALMER

An arrangement of Frances Palmer's dahlias — for more information go to www.francespalmer.com

sight of those other flowers poking their heads out of the bunch in your arrangements, like the fall anemones and Queen Anne's lace I've seen recently. Anything special I should know about keeping arrangements alive as long as possible?

FP: I pick flowers first thing in the morning so they are really fresh and they last about three to four days. I've heard that you can make the droopy ones come back by putting them in hot water but I've never tried it myself.

CK: Do you ever use vessels other than your own for the flowers?

FP: Yes, I like to see the stems and so sometimes I'll use a glass container — jelly jars are great. The vases don't have to be fancy.

CK: Frances, thanks so much for your amazing aesthetic and great information. Have a bountiful fall season.

More about Frances Palmer can be found at www.francespalmerpottery.com

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