



Hosta Happenings

October 2009

Vol. 13, Iss. 9

**M.V.H.S. MEETING
SUNDAY, OCT 11, 2009
6:00 P.M.**

**Riverdale Fire Station
(across from ALCOA)
Riverdale, Iowa**

PROGRAM

Join us for a

Panel Discussion:

**“Learning Tools – How to Grow Hostas”
followed by a Q & A Session**

Fall Slug Control

by Mary Bardens, NW Indiana Hosta Society

Did you know that fall is still egg-laying time for slugs? We tend to forget about them as the hosta leaves change color and head into dormancy. The slugs will be active until the soil temperatures reach freezing when they will go into hibernation until the spring thaw. So, until that happens, they will lay eggs. Mating will occur from August until mid-October with eggs laid about 30-40 days after that. Look for 1/8 to 1/4 inch sized gelatinous clusters of about 20-30 spheres. Older slugs will lay larger quantities. The eggs may be hard to see as they can reflect their surroundings. When the eggs are near hatching, the spheres may become cloudy. Slugs love those piles of leaves, damp from heavy dews and fall rains. Look for them under anything that will keep them cool and moist. Other favorite places will be flower pots, boards, cooled compost piles, at the edge of large rocks or under mulch.

So the big question is-what to do?

1. Eliminate their favorite spots. Clean up the old hosta leaves and other debris. Turn the compost pile to make it too hot to be attractive for them. Check under those flower pots before you store them.

2. Set a slug trap. They are attracted to any fermenting food: beer or a mixture of sugar, yeast and water. Sink a tuna can to 1" of ground level so they will crawl in and drown. If you put it flush to the ground you run the risk of drowning ground beetles which are a slug predator. Colorado State U. Entomology Professor Whitney determined that their favorite types of beer were Kingsbury Malt, Michelob & Budweiser. Check often to empty. Replace beer weekly. Commercial slug baiting stations are available. If you leave a flat board on the damp ground, you can scrape them off in the morning.

3. Go on a slug hunt. Late at night or very early morning, grab a flash light and bucket of soapy water to drop them into after hand picking. Slugs are nocturnal and love to hit the all night hosta diner. Watch for the little ones. Like teenagers, they are voracious eaters. You can even use a handheld vacuum to suck up the little pests, but you may want to warn the next person to use it.

4. Encourage a predator to hang out in your garden. Toads, turtles, owls, Mourning Doves, and Robins love slugs. And then there are some predators that we may not be too thrilled coming upon in the hosta bed that also feast on slugs: black ground beetles, opossums, shrews, wild turkeys, chipmunks, skunks, moles and Northern Ringneck snakes.

5. Iron Phosphate. Slug bait pellets made from this can stop slugs without poisoning birds, small pets, humans or earthworms. Though they are not sure exactly why, iron phosphate inhibits the slugs from feeding. And, it is actually good for the soil. This is sold under the names of Sluggo, Es-car-go, and Safer's Slug & Snail Bait.

6. Metaldehyde. This is a molluscicide which means it is a poison that kills slugs and can be purchased in a form to spray on the hostas. It is very effective for killing slugs, but also earthworms and other things with which it comes in contact. Great care in handling, application and storage must be observed.

7. Ammonia Solution. A solution of household ammonia (1 part ammonia:5 parts water) in a spray bottle with the nozzle set on a direct stream and sprayed directly on the slug will kill it in a few seconds. This solution will not harm the plants.

8. Barriers. Copper tape placed around the hostas repels slugs because as they slime across it, it causes a toxic reaction like an electrical shock. But if they find a leaf lying over the barrier, they get in. A product called Slug de-Fence is composed of a low density polyethylene plastic and vacuum grade table salt. It repels the slugs unless they try to get over it, and then the salt gets them. Although, I'm imagining it may also look like you tried to wrap your plants with little trash bag fences.

9. Abrasive Materials. Eggshells, coffee grounds, sand, cedar shaving, hair or ash may be placed around plants which scratches the slugs bodies causing them to dehydrate. Diatomaceous earth can also be used, but it is a very fine powder and you must wear a mask to keep from inhaling it. But, these products must all be kept dry to work, so they must be reapplied after a rain.

10. Biologic Control. In Europe you may purchase the parasitic nematode *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita* which is naturally occurring in their soil. This is a microscopic worm that enters the slug's body through natural openings and releases bacteria that multiplies and kills the slug in 4-16 days. It does not bother earthworms. It also has the ability to recycle and become part of the ecosystem in the absence of a host which would make it good for long term management. It is marketed under the name Nemaslug. But, don't try to add it to your Thompson & Morgan order just yet, it's still illegal here. Agricultural scientists collaborating from Ohio State U. and Purdue U. are doing parasitic nematode research to help protect crops in no-till fields which are most susceptible to slug damage. They are also evaluating the American parasitic nematode cousin, but so far none is as effective at the European relative. They are compiling data showing the safety of importing nematode *Phasmarhabditis hermaphrodita* into our soil.

Collectors, Splitters, Clumpers by Ray Rodgers, Central Illinois Hosta Society

The first phase of this self-assessment is to determine whether your gardening traits make you more of a gardener or a collector.

The purest of “Gardeners” have a predetermined place for every purchase and every plant must be in its place. Planting three or more of a particular variety often makes good design sense. Such gardeners have a seemingly never-ending thirst, or possibly an addiction, to work in their gardens. Gardeners typically are not concerned with exactly how many hostas they have, and are not terribly concerned about labeling or keeping track of plant purchases in any way. Their primary concern is to possess diverse plantings, providing ever-changing seasonal appeal.

Gardeners that join hosta societies often gradually move at least slightly towards becoming collectors, while still retaining the seasonal beauty of their gardens.

“Collectors” do not make purchases based on need. In the mind of the most avid collectors, there is always room for more hostas, even when available space dictates otherwise. In their minds, there are friends, neighbors and relatives’ yards to relegate the less desirable hostas, creating space for more exciting varieties. More so than gardeners, collectors have a hard time resisting the lure of newer introductions. At least on occasion, collectors are more willing to exceed their price comfort zone for “must have” hostas. When doing so, they may choose not to share the purchase price with their spouse. A collector would rather purchase three different varieties than three of one variety.

Collectors may do what is required to display their hostas well, but when given a choice, will often opt for another buying trip or the opportunity to visit someone else’s garden, rather than work in their own. Such collectors most often keep track of all hosta purchases, usually in some sort of hard-copy or electronic spreadsheet. At any time, collectors typically know at least approximately how many hostas they have, especially during the early years of their addiction. To the most avid hosta collector, a good companion plant would be another hosta.

Those that start out as true collectors, find it difficult to spend very much of their available funds on other types of plant material. In my opinion, gardeners that become collectors are more apt to have beautiful gardens than those of us that start out as collectors.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 exhibiting only traits of the purest gardener and 10 being the most avid collector), where are you? For the sake of this exercise, let’s say the person exhibits some traits of both the gardener and the collector, but lean a bit more towards the right. Let’s rank this person as a 7.

Through the eyes of this long-time hosta lover and admirer of great gardens, a 6 or 7 is optimal. Regardless of how you have rated yourself to this point, there are two other traits for consideration. Gardeners as well as collectors can be splitters, clumpers, or somewhere in between.

When “Splitters” purchase double or multi-crowned hostas, their mind eventually gets around to dividing. Sometimes it is right away, sometimes the action happens the following year. For these folks, more is better than big! Splitters are quick with the knife when it comes to sharing, trading, selling, or feel the need for a hosta to have a presence in another location. Newer hosta fanciers often consider dividing as a way to quickly increase their total number of hostas. Some splitters don’t know, or choose to ignore the fact, that unlike iris and daylilies, hostas do not need to be divided.

In contrast, “Clumpers” are basically the exact opposite. They take great joy in nurturing their hostas into large mature clumps. For these folks, bigger is truly better than more! When clumpers feel a particular hosta is not sited for optimal growth, they would rather move the entire clump than chop it up. Clumpers don’t make great trading partners.

On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 always having a reason to divide hostas, and 10 almost never wanting to divide a hosta), where are you? For this part of the assessment, let’s consider the person as an 8.

In my opinion, single clumps grown to perfection are far more impressive than multiple smaller plantings of the same variety. Yet, dividing is certainly recommended for hostas that are sporting, reverting, or to a lesser extent experiencing center clump dieback. Thusly, I would consider something in the 7 to 9 range as being ideal.

So, based on the example, the fictitious person is rated as a 7 on the Gardener / Collector scale and an 8 on the Splitter / Clumper scale. Combined, this person would be a 7/8.

What are your numbers? Keep in mind that no matter where you rate yourself today, your numbers may change as your gardening experiences continue to evolve.

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HOSTA SOCIETY

presents

Speaker - **Mark Zilis**

Author of the Hostapedia and The Hosta Handbook



When: Sun., Nov 8, 2009 – 2:00 pm

Where: Scott County Extension Office

875 Tanglefoot Lane, Bettendorf, Iowa

No Charge: Compliments of the Mississippi Valley Hosta Society

Mark is a nationally known expert on hosta and author of the most current hosta resource book. He has introduced dozens of hosta -- Sugar and Cream, Pineapple Upsidedown Cake, Summer Breeze to name just a few.

Topic: 'Hosta Highlights'.. will cover hostas from Japan, hybridizing, tissue culture, hosta sports (new variations), current problems and will be open to audience questions.

AHS DUES: The American Hosta Society offers participation in all national activities, including a convention, 3 issues of "The Hosta Journal", and a directory. They also have a web page - www.hosta.org. Dues are \$30/yr, \$57/2 yrs and \$600 life for an individual. Family memberships are also available at \$34/yr and \$62/2 yrs. Make your check to AHS and send to the Membership Secretary, Sandie Markland, 8702 Pinnacle Rock Ct., Lorton, VA 22079.

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**Midwest Regional Hosta Society Dues** are \$10/yr. Send your check to: Peter Postlewaite, Treasurer, 21172 Andover Rd., Kildeer, IL 60047.

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MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HOSTA SOCIETY DUES are \$7/YR. Please make your check payable to MVHS and send to Dean Piatt, Treasurer, 2910 Telegraph Rd., Davenport, IA 52804. We offer 8 newsletters a year, reduced prices on hosta offerings, garden walks, first opportunity to buy plants at our annual hosta and plant sale and many other good opportunities.

Mississippi Valley Hosta Society
909 Mississippi Blvd.
Bettendorf, Iowa 52722

WHAT'S HAPPENING!

- Oct 11** - MVHS Meeting - 6 PM
Riverdale Fire Station
- Nov 8** - Mark Zilis, IA Extension Office, 2 PM
- Dec 4** - Annual Holiday Party, Outing Club

Visit our MVHS Web Site: **mvhosta.org**
Other hosta and garden web sites:
American Hosta Society - <http://www.hosta.org>
Midwest Hosta Society - <http://www.midwesthostasociety.org>
Hosta Library - <http://www.hostalibrary.org>
Hosta Forum - questions/answers - <http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/hosta>
Mini Hosta Forum - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/minihosta>

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**LET US KNOW!!! IF YOU HAVE MOVED or HAS YOUR EMAIL CHANGED?**  
**Send your corrected info to DEAN PIATT, 2910 TELEGRAPH RD., DAVENPORT, IA 52804.** His email is: [dpiatt@mvhosta.org](mailto:dpiatt@mvhosta.org)