September 2006 . . Vol. 10, Iss. 7

# Hosta Happenings

*Mississippi Valley Hosta Society*

# M.V.H.S. MEETING

# SUNDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2006
# 6:00 PM

## RIVERDALE FIRE STATION
## RIVERDALE, IOWA
(across from ALCOA)

# GLENN HEROLD
Professor of Horticulture
Central Illinois College

## will speak on
## "CONIFERS IN THE SHADE"

## BALANCE THE SCALES

By Mary Chastain of Lakeside Acres (This article was originally published by the Chattanooga Regional Hosta Society)

Fall clean up time is just around the corner. Lately I have read articles dealing with how we should leave our hosta gardens for the winter. As in life there is no perfect way that we can meet the needs of all. Some articles have been emphatic in the fact that leaving leaves on the garden is the thing to do. I agree with the idea that leaves offer protection for the plants during the winter months and they also provide nutrients for the soil. They help keep the ground cool in the spring so hostas are not as likely to emerge too early. This is good and I concur with those things.

Other articles have dismissed this fact saying it is better to remove all of the weeds and old foliage from the garden in the fall. At this time I wish to say, leaves may hold excessive moisture as well as fungi, both of which can be harmful to your hostas. The leaf cover provides space for a well-run hatchery for the proliferation of slugs. Leaving old plant foliage contributes to the spread of fungi and disease that may be present.

My proclamation is that what works for one is not necessarily for the good of all. If you live in a vole infested area letting the leaves remain on the garden will just about guarantee your loss of hostas over the winter. Voles prefer to move and work in a protected environment. They believe this wonderful blanket of leaves was created just for them. Under this cover they build a network of freeways which takes them from the banquet table of your hosta to the playground where they invite their family, friends and neighbors to come enjoy the buffet. They laughingly announce there is plenty for all. Cleaning the garden of weeds, old foliage and leaves in the fall reduces the chance of spreading disease. It also lowers the risk of vole destruction. It eliminates many of the hiding places for voles and slugs. A clean surface allows for the early spring treatment for slugs and provides easier access for fertilizer. Keeping the slug population low during fall and winter eases your battle for control during the growing season. Removing disease materials lowers your risk of incurring trouble next year. For example, consider the possibility of leaving plants and mulch contaminated with the fungus that causes southern blight. How much more likely you are to be plagues with it the following season. Once the garden is clean and ready for winter, a thin layer of clean new pine needles can be spread to offer some winter protection and diminish the washing of your soil. A thin cover of pine needles allows air to circulate over the ground . Though they offer some shade and protection for your plants they are open enough to discourage the construction of vole freeways.

Now that we have weighed the pros and cons you must balance the scales to meet the situation in your garden. Will the value of leaves in your garden outweigh the disadvantages they may offer?

Dear Friends,

Many thanks to all who helped in the last few months digging hostas from Forrest Johnson's yard – Ron and Teri Simmering, Jim and Barb Cato, Sally Stewart, Shirley Waters, Dean and Karen Stotz, Mark Nagen, and Franc Freeman. (I hope I haven't forgotten anyone); but a huge thank you to Mike Carstensen who not only helped dig but took most of them home and planted them in one of his fields until Spring!!! He really deserves a big gold star!!! I also want to thank Forrest for donating his hostas to us. They really helped make our June Plant Sale a huge success and next year's will be just as big and wonderful.

We had a good turnout for our annual picnic – it was a rainy afternoon, but we met in the old stone garage at VanderVeer that has been renovated into a meeting room. We have such good cooks in our club – everything tasted soooo good! One of the good things was Arlene Shindelar's Taco Dip and her recipe is in this newsletter.

**Election of officers is going to be held in November. Three of the four officers have to step down, according to our by-laws, and we need people to say they will serve on the board. This club is too vibrant an organization to let it die because of lack of participation. When asked by Ron Simmering and his committee – please say you'll serve.**

*CAROLYN*

# NEW PRESS RELEASE FROM THE GARY WHITTENBAUGH INSTITUE OF DWARF AND SLOW GROWING CONIFERS. (GWI)

*By Chub Harper*

As an Associate Professor of Research at the Institute at the GWI, I am pleased to announce our latest research announcement on yet a new field of discovery involving "sudden dwarf conifer death syndrome".

We all are aware of "CRS" and some of you are aware of "CRSS", but our new acronym for the new discovery is "**CSS**" **(CONIFER SUFFOCATION SYNDROME)** is a new breakthrough in plant research. All people suffer with the two aforementioned people problems but the newly discovered "**CSS**" is a plant problem especially for dwarf and miniature conifers and has been present for many years.

The basis of the research has been the observations of our GWI staff for many years of the untimely and fast destruction of many truly beautiful and rare specimens of miniature and dwarf forms of Pinus, Larix, and other genera. Three especially desirable forms of dwarf and miniature conifers such as *Larix laricina* 'Newport Beauty', *Pinus strobus* 'Sea Urchin' and *Pinus rigida* 'Sherman Eddy' have been especially hard hit with this syndrome.

In trying to deal with this devastating disease complex all resources and the vast knowledge of the staff from the GWI have been put into action. The one common thread in our research project has been the suffocation aspect because of the density of the dead needles of the dwarf forms which DO NOT process the ability to shed these needles as do the species because of their

dense growth. As a result the needles accumulate to form a dense barrier within the interior of the plant and cause suffocation. This suffocation prevents normal photosynthesis (this creates temperatures that shuts down the photosynthetic process within the plant) This also creates other major problems that interfere with other normal plant functions such as air circulation (cooling) that causes over-heating and dehydration because of this thick impenetrable barrier created, and the normal moisture absorption from rain is diverted which causes critical loss of moisture for the plant and for the root system,

These are the primary causes of the results of our research at the GWI. We are continuing our on-going research on this project and your observations and your intellect would be appropriate to help solve this devastating problem.

The solution to the problem is simple maintenance and diligence in keeping the excess and surplus needles cleaned out from the interior and base of the plant to prevent the aforementioned problems. This is something that can be done annually and it is not hard work and gives one pleasure and is a way to communicate directly with these beautiful plants and enjoy them in our gardens and collections.

These surplus needles make and excellent mulch for other plants especially perennials and other plants especially the miniature hosta. (hostages). This is a great way to re-cycle this wonderful organic matter.

There is an on going study of this problem at the GWI of study. Your help and input is
solicited. This is a serious effort at the GWI and we take our **CSS** seriously and hope that on going research will reveal more answers to this complex subject such as TOO DEEP OF PLANTING, STRANGLING/GIRDLING ROOTS (SGR), and other factors that add up to final demise of a plant. A simple analogy is the old saying "the straw that broke the camel' back". Add all these problems together and then that ends in **"CSS"**.

# Spring Bulbs make Great Hosta Companions

Underplanting hosta with spring-flowering bulbs is a great way to incorporate added spring interest before the hosta have emerged. Underplanting, best described as incorporating multiple plants into the same space that will flower at differing times, dramatically enhancing seasonal interest. The bulbs best suited for use with hosta are those with smaller, less conspicuous foliage that will not overwhelm the emerging hosta in spring. Dense plantings of standard daffodils can smother hosta with the passing foliage. Some of the best bulbs for underplanting hosta are winter aconite, snowdrop, Siberian squill, and dwarf daffodil.

Fall installation is required for most spring flowering bulbs. Plant when the soil temperatures have dropped to 60°F. Bulbs should be in the ground by Thanksgiving.

Well drained soil is a must to have bulbs that will thrive and bloom year after year. If a large group of bulbs will be planted, prepare the bed. Work sphagnum peat moss or mushroom compost into the bed along with bone meal or Bulb Food.

Plant bulbs at the proper depth; the general rule of thumb on this is two to three times the height of the bulb. Be sure to place the bulb right side up so that the roots can go straight down and the tops go straight up. Some bulbs are very difficult to determine which end is up, so when in doubt, plant the bulb sideways. The roots will still go downward and the tops up. Fertilize with Bulb Food or bone meal, if you have not already added it to the planting bed. You can add this into individual holes if this is how you are planting. Finally, water the newly planted bulbs after backfilling.

**Bulb Tips**

- Naturalize ground cover areas with small bulbs such as snowdrops, Siberian squill, grape hyacinths or dwarf daffodils planted in among the groundcover.
- Select varieties with different flowering times to increase the period of bloom in your bulb display. Also select different heights and pleasing color combinations to add to the interest and beauty of your garden.
- Always plant bulbs in drifts or masses. A single row of tulips will not have nearly the affect that a mass of red tulips next to a mass of white tulips.
- Bigger bulbs mean bigger blooms. Pick out premium sized bulbs for the biggest, showiest blooms. Fertilizing with a bulb food, high in phosphorous, also helps make bigger bulbs, thus bigger blooms.
- Use a bulb planter or auger for fast planting. The auger can fit on the end of an electric drill to make planting faster and easier.
- Store your bulbs in a well-ventilated, cool, dry place, if you are not planting them immediately. Keep away from any ripening fruit. Remember that bulbs are a living product that requires special care. Do not expose your bulbs to temperature extremes.
- Allow the foliage of the bulbs to die down after flowering. This will ensure proper time to store energy in the bulb for flowering next year. Planting bulbs at the back or middle of the border lessens the visibility of passing bulb foliage.
- Underplant bulbs among perennials, shrubs and annuals to extend seasonal interest. Older passing foliage may be masked by later emerging perennials, especially if like-foliages are paired up (ie. Daffodil/Daylily).

**Early-flowering Bulbs**

Claytonia, Spring Beauty
Chionodoxa, Glory-of-the-Snow
Crocus
Eranthis, Winter Aconite
Galanthus, Snowdrops
Puschkinia, Striped Squill
Scilla, Siberian Squill
Kaufmannia Tulips

**Naturalizing Bulbs**

Galanthus, Snowdrops
Scilla, Siberian Squill
Claytonia, Spring Beauty
Muscari, Grape Hyacinth
Narcissus, Daffodils
Puschkinia, Striped Squill

# FALL SLUG CONTROL

By Mary Bardens from Hosta & Friends Garden Club *8/27/06* Newsletter

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 ¼ 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 fiat 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 lite 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. The is sold under the names of Sluggo, Es-car-go, and
Safer's Slug & Snail Bait.

6. Metaldehyde. This is a molluscide 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 70-80% solution of household ammonia put into 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 with 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 repeals 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. Eggs hel Is, coffee grounds, sand, cedar shaving, hair or ash may be place 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 slugs body through natural openings and releases a 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 no4ill 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.

## AMERICAN HOSTA SOCIETY POPULARITY POLL 2005

| RANK | CULTIVAR |
|---|---|
| 1 | H. 'June' |
| 2 | H. 'Sagae' |
| 3 | H. 'Sum and Substance' |
| 4 | H. 'Striptease' |
| 5 | H. 'Guacamole' |
| 6 | H. 'Paul's Glory' |
| 7 | H. 'Krossa Regal' |
| 8 | H. 'Paradigm' |
| 9 | H. 'Blue Angel' |
| 10 | H. *montana* 'Aureomarginata' |
| 11 | H. 'Halcyon' |
| 12 | H. 'Regal Splendor' |
| 13 | H. 'Sun Power' |
| 14 | H. 'Stained Glass' |
| 15 | H. 'Gold Standard' |
| 16 | H. 'Great Expectations' |
| 17 | H. 'Abiqua Drinking Gourd' |
| 18 | H. 'Patriot' |
| 19 | H. 'Inniswood' |
| 20 | H. 'Whirlwind' |
| 21 | H. 'Love Pat' |
| 22 | H. ' Fragrant Bouquet' |
| 23 | H. 'On Stage' |
| 24 | H. 'Guardian Angel' |
| 25 | H. 'Summer Music |

## AMERICAN HOSTA SOCIETY MINI POPULARITY POLL 2005

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|---|---|
| 1 | H. 'Pandora's Box' |
| 2 | H. 'Baby Bunting' |
| 3 | H. 'Lemon Lime' |
| 4 | H. 'Tiny Tears' |
| 5 | H. 'Popo' |
| 6 | H. *venusta* |
| 7 | H. 'Green Eyes' |
| 8 | H. 'Feather Boa' |
| 9 | H. 'Cookie Crumbs' |
| 10 } TIE | H. 'Vanilla Cream' |
| 10 } TIE | H. 'Twist of Lime' |

**Dues for the Mississippi Valley Hosta Society are $7 per year. Please make your check payable to MVHS and send to JIM CATO, Treasurer, 12915 25TH St. Ct., Milan, IL 61264.**

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The **American Hosta Society** offers participation in all national activities, including a national convention, three issues of "The Hosta Journal", and a directory. They also have a web page - www.hosta.org. Dues are $25/yr, $47/2 yrs and $500 life for an individual. Family memberships are also available at $29/yr and $52/2 yrs. Make your check to American Hosta Society and send to the AHS Membership Secretary, Sandie Markland, 8702 Pinnacle Rock Ct., Lorton, VA 22079.

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Dues for **Midwest Regional Hosta Society** are $10/yr. Send your check to AUDRA WILSON, 1789 Hwy #92, Ackworth, IA 50001.

**DATES TO REMEMBER:**

**OCT 1 - 12-3 PM, Friends of Riverside, Moline, Fall Plant Sale**
**OCT 8 – 6 PM, MVHS Meeting, Riverdale**
**NOV 12 – 2 PM, MVHS Mtg, Riverdale, Election of Officers**
**DEC 1 – Annual Christmas Party**

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TACO DIP

1 lb ground beef
1 can (16 oz) kidney beans mashed
1 can (8 oz) tomato sauce
¾ pkg Taco Seasoning mix
1 small onion chopped
½ tsp. dry mustard
½ med green pepper chopped
1 cup sour cream
½ cup shredded lettuce
½ cup shredded cheddar cheese

Brown beef and add next 7 ingredients. Heat through. Serve warm in deep dish. Add sour cream and spread over. Top with cheese and lettuce. You may add fresh cut up tomato.
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