Growing Together

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Daffodil & Hosta Society of Western Pennsylvania **SEPTEMBER 2024**

Hi Folks!

Fall is quickly approaching us. I have been seeing the start of the color change in the trees and the leaf burnout of my hostas. This summer sure was a hot and dry one. A little cooler and a lot more rain would have been preferred.

Looking back we have had a really fun season so far. I would have to say my favorite event of the year was the eclipse party that Sue had planned for us at DJ's Greenhouse. It was a very interesting experience to see how dark it really got.

The hosta show was a great success but I may be biased after winning Best In Show with Allen C Haskell. Followed by the picnic at DJ's, which who would ever complain about getting to go shopping at DJ's!

Later this month a bunch of you folks will be going to Fall Forum and then next month we have a general meeting on October 19 at 1pm at St John's of the highland. Dianne Machesney, Allegheny County Master Gardener, will talk on "Landscaping in Deer Country."

We are still in desperate need of volunteers to replace a few of us on the steering committee. Please consider volunteering. You will have all the support you would need from myself and all of the existing members. Looking to replace president, VP Hosta, Secretary and Newsletter editor. None of these positions are hard or overwhelming. Please let me know if you are interested.

See you all soon!
Megan Danik
The Pres.

Steering Committee

President
Megan Danik

Vice-President Hosta
Gary Gahagan

Vice-Presidents Daffodils
Karen Schmidt

Treasurer
Patty McGuire

Secretary
Susan Gahagan

Co-Chair Daffodils
Gary Ball

Co-Chair Hostas
Keith Portka

Membership
Patty Reigh

Speaker Facilitator
Karen Schmidt

Education
Jim Kalka

Members At Large
Teva Mayer
Chuck Olescyski

Newsletter Editor
C. Alicia Pérez

E-Mail Editor to:
Pitvp@aol.com

TNT…TIME AND TALENT SURVEY!

By Chuck Olescyski

The purpose for the T&T Survey is to determine how best you can volunteer your time when matched with your particular talent or skill.

The DHSWP is in need to recruit members to carry out the mission of our club. (no previously experience needed)

We not only need folks to serve on the SC (upcoming elections in November) but to volunteer for the varied activities and events through out the upcoming year.

Please consider offering your T&T by completing the enclosed Survey and submitting your responses at an upcoming meeting or contact Chuck Olescyski. (Next page)

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important message!

Chuck O
Box 14, Mars PA 16046
724-538-5584

AN UPDATE OF THE T&T SURVEY

Thirty one (31) surveys were completed and tabulated at our End of Year Banquet.
Twenty one (21) folks responded with 10 abstaining.
Here's the math...1/3 of our membership made commitment to participate and help with the club's events. It is hoped that the remaining 2/3 of the club will complete the Survey and contribute to the smooth operation of our society.

CATEGORY I. VOLUNTEERS - Members are needed to assist with these 18 activities throughout the year. Members checked 96 areas where they are willing to help.

Plant Sales - 8	Donating to Raffles - 10
Dividing/Planting Pots - 7	Setting up Shows/Events - 8
Providing Snacks - 12	Serving as Clerks for Shows - 9

CATEGORY II - STANDING COMMITTEES - Steering Committee
Eleven positions available with 4 members expressing an interest in Member at Large and 2 volunteering for Membership, Treasurer, and Education.

CATEGORY III - HOSTA/DAFFODIL COMMITTEES -

Placement - 5	Classification - 5
Clerks - 10	Judges - 5

CATEGORY IV - OTHER

Annual/Picnic Auctions - 6	Fall Forum - 8

Note* Areas less that 6 tallies not generally recorded. Please be kind and volunteer to become an active member of the DHSWP.
Thank You...Chuck O

DHSWP—TIME AND TALENT!

NAME _____

I. VOLUNTEERS: *Members are needed to assist with these activities throughout the year. Please consider helping!*

_____ plant sales
_____ transportation of plants
_____ dividing/potting plants
_____ donating to raffles
_____ provide food/snacks for meetings
_____ setting up for shows/events
_____ submit surveys when requested
_____ write/submit articles to the newsletter
_____ serve as a greeter at meetings
_____ assist with distributing handouts at meetings
_____ serve at a 'welcome table'
_____ serve as a clerk for shows
_____ serve as a judge for shows
_____ serve on a hosta show committee *see Special Committees
_____ serve on a daffodil show committee * see Special Committees
_____ assist/contribute to web site
_____ assist/contribute to face book
_____ willingness to do a presentation or serve as a speaker

II. STANDING COMMITTEES: *Serve as a member of the Steering Committee. There are 11 positions available and elections are held every 3 years. Next election is November 2024.*

_____ President
_____ Vice-President Daffodils
_____Co-Chair Daffodils
_____ Vice-President Hosta
_____ Co-Chair Hosta
_____ Membership
_____ Speaker Facilitator
_____ Treasurer
_____ Education
_____ Secretary
_____ Members At Large
_____ Newsletter Editor

III. SPECIAL COMMITTEES: *These are short term commitments designed to assist with a specific event during the year. Individuals are needed to chair these various committees.*

Hosta/Daffodil Show Committees

_____ Show Chair
_____ Judges
_____ Vice-Chair
_____ Publicity
_____ Awards Table
_____ Clerks
_____ Classification
_____ Properties/Staging
_____ Plant Sales
_____ Placement
_____ Artistic Design
_____ Membership
_____ Schedule
_____ Hospitality

Other Special Committees include:

_____ Annual Soup Luncheon with PIDS
_____ Hosta College
_____ Annual Picnic/Auction
_____ Hoop House Sales
_____ Bus Trip
_____ Garden in the Parks
_____ Teaching Judges Clinics
_____ Fall Forum
_____ End of Year Luncheon

Please submit to Chuck Olescyski either via email: cvoaeo@zoominternet.net
or mail to: Box 14, Mars, PA 16046
Thank you for your participation!!

Meteorological Fall and What it Means to Plants

by Mary Lewnes Albrecht, PhD, Professor Emeritus and ETHS Communications Director

(This article is courtesy of the East Tennessee Hosta Society' newsletter, Hosta Happenings, September 2023.)

Since meteorological fall starts this week (September 23 is the autumnal equinox), days will continue to get shorter. So what does that mean to plants?

Shorter days trigger a physiological response in plants that "tells" them to start going dormant. With shorter days and lower light intensity, chlorophyll is not regenerated as much and reaches the point where it no longer is produced in the leaves. Chlorophyll actually breaks down every day and needs to be produced each day. As the days shorten (or as the nights lengthen), there just isn't enough energy and carbohydrates left in the leaves to produce chlorophyll so production slows down and then stops all together (this is a fairly simplistic explanation). Other plant pigments become visible, such as anthocyanins and carotenoids. Anthocyanins pigments are blue, red, or purple. Carotenoids produce the yellow, orange, red, and purple colors. So as chlorophyll production ceases, it is no longer present to mask the other pigments in the foliage.

As the leaves are no longer producing carbohydrates, they become a liability to the plant. An abscission layer (a layer of cells that 8 is present at the base of the petiole where it attaches to the stem; that point is called the leaf node) forms which seals off the tissues that allows water flow into the leaves and photosynthates (those carbohydrates) that exit the leaves and stored in the branches and roots from flowing in either direction. Any excess sugars (carbohydrates) leads to the production of the colorful pigments. The formation of the abscission layer prevents water flow into the leaf and the leaves eventually die and drop off at the point of the abscission layer.

(I have probably just spoiled the beauty of autumn color for some of you!)

Leaves will be falling (tulip poplar and hackberry have already started in my yard). There are those who promote leaving the fallen leaves in place and allowing them to naturally decompose as they do in the forest. In many subdivisions, there is an expectation that lawns are cleared of leaf litter (notice that negative connotation in calling it litter!). If you must clear the leaves from the turf, simply stockpile in areas where they can go through decomposition. This natural leaf layer also provides refuge for many caterpillars and other insects for overwintering. Birds and other animals will dig through the leaves in search of winter food.

Of course, you may not have an area where you can simply spread the leaves to allow for the slow and natural decomposition to occur. You can always use a lawnmower with a bag attachment to capture the shredded leaves and add to a compost pile. Or, you can use a leaf shredder to break the leaves into smaller pieces and compost the resulting broken-up leaves (see photo). This will not completely destroy caterpillars, eggs, or insects found on the leaves.

Enough survives. My compost pile composed of shredded leaves is often visited by birds and small mammals looking for things to eat. I find signs of digging and pecking along the edges and top of the pile. As the leaves break down, there will be a release of nutrients to the soil. So, it's a win win situation. And, as fall progresses, our gardening tasks will shift away from growing and enjoying pollinators that frequent our gardens to getting ready for winter!

Plants and Freezing Temperatures

by Mary Lewnes Albrecht, PhD, Professor Emeritus and ETHS Communications Director

(This article is courtesy of the East Tennessee Hosta Society' newsletter, Hosta Happenings, Sept 2023.)

The short explanation is "Don't worry! Plants have had this handled for millennia." But, there is a longer explanation that can involve plant physiology. Here's an explanation in terms everyone should understand.

Different plant species handle freezing temperatures differently based upon where they originated. If the plant originally came from the tropics, it didn't evolve freeze survival mechanisms. This is why it's always useful to know where plants came from. Think about it this way, would you leave a peace lily (Spathiphyllum species and hybrids) out in the wintertime in East Tennessee? No! Of course not. It's a tropical plant coming from places like Mexico, Tropical America, Malesia, and the Western Pacific. Most sources list its hardiness zone as 11a through 12b. 9 Even with the recent revision of the USDA Hardiness Zone Map, East Tennessee is not that tropical.

On the other hand, hardiness zones 3 through 9 are commonly listed for Hosta. They can survive freezes in East Tennessee (Zones 6 and 7 depending upon elevation) when they have already gone dormant. That's the key – they go dormant!

So, if its January or February and we have freezing temperatures, herbaceous perennials that are dormant, will not suffer freeze damage. Woody plant material will behave differently.

During the fall, woody plant materials (trees and shrubs) respond to the shortening day lengths and cooler temperatures to prepare for winter. Leaves go dormant and fall off of deciduous plant species. This reduces the surface area exposed to lower humidity that could result in moisture loss from the foliage.

Also during this period of shorter days and cooler nights, plants increase the amount of sugar, salt or other compounds mixed in the water in their cells – plant antifreeze. Having these chemicals in the cells of tree and shrub branches helps to lower the freezing point of cell sap. They can withstand much colder temperatures. Some plants will also reduce the amount of water in the cells by translocating it into the roots.

Dormancy also means plants just aren't growing – they are not doing the things that are needed for growth because they are not producing the carbohydrates in their leaves needed to produce more plant cells. Pretty amazing when you think about it. So at this time of the year, when plants are dormant, they tend to be much less susceptible to freeze damage.

Now, if we are pushing hardiness zones, that's a different story. In my garden, I'm pushing hardiness zones. I have cast-iron plant (Aspidistra 'Okame' and 'Lennon's Song', both rated for Zones 7b – 10b), two unknown amaryllis varieties (Hippeastrum Zones 8 – 10), and Thai Giant elephant ears (Colocasia gigantea, Zones 8 – 10). Yes, we are now Zone 7b in the reclassification. Obviously, I'm pushing my luck with these plants. How do I handle it? Cover them with copious amounts of fallen leaves. The elephant ears and amaryllis are under about a foot of leaves. The cast-iron plants don't receive anything special other than some more mulch around the crowns since they are evergreen. 10 Camellias are another example of pushing the envelop with hardiness zones. Camellia japonica and C. sasanqua are listed as Zones 7 to 9.

So we are in the northern area of their hardiness zone. Typically, with hard freezes at this time of the year, those winter flowering varieties will experience damage to the flowers because they are actively growing and expanding the flower parts. Flower parts do not undergo the described process of developing dormancy.

Freeze damage will be less obvious at this time of the year. We've had cold weather, plants are dormant. Freeze damage occurs with freakish, early freezes when there is an extreme drop in temperatures. Or, it may occur in the late winter when temperatures start to warm up and plants are coming out of dormancy. Plants have started the processes to begin growth and they become more susceptible to freeze damage.

So, the bottom line is don't worry about doing anything very special for garden plants now! They're dormant.

Start paying attention in March as plants are coming out of their dormancy then. The vernal equinox is March 19, 2024 (it will be 20 March in 2025); days and nights are now equal length. Plants will know this and will be on their way out of dormancy. And, we have had springs when weather began to warm up in late February and into early March and then low and behold, freezing temperatures for several nights occur in March. That's when damage can occur. But not now while the plants are dormant.

September Hosta Tips, from the Hosta Guy

By Rob Mortko, Made in the Shade Gardens

As we transition into the fall season there's much to be done in the garden.

Fall is for Planting

Many folks might conclude that hostas can only be planted in the spring because they seem to "disappear" in local nurseries and garden centers by the first of June. Fact is, container grown hostas can be planted any time during the growing season. What's more, by planting now you can gain nearly a full growing season as compared to waiting until next spring. This will be readily apparent next spring as you will most likely have multiple eyes or pips emerge as a result of planting now. Remember we maintain our hosta stock year-round and still have thousands to choose from.

Dividing Hostas

Fall is considered the "optimum" time for hosta division as roots can continue to grow and establish themselves until our first killing frost (which averages October 26th in KC). Remember hostas never need to be divided as opposed to most perennials that will become less vigorous after 3-5 years if not divided. With hostas it's a choice you make.

To divide hostas it is usually easiest to dig and lift the entire clump. Then use a spade or knife to divide into smaller sections. The key is to retain an adequate root structure for each division. If needed, use a hose to wash away the soil to get a closer look at where you should be making your divisions. When replanting, use a root starter/stimulator solution, but avoid any high nitrogen fertilizer this late in the season.

Don't forget the value of good soil prep. Since hostas never need to be divided, you really only get one chance to do a good job of preparing the soil with plenty of organic matter. Never plant that $5 hosta in a 50-cent hole. Even worse is planting a $20 hosta in that same 50 cent hole!!!

Planting Hosta Seeds

Chances are you have at least a few hosta bloom scapes that set seed. The seed pod will crack open in due time indicating the seed has matured. The seed is generally viable if it has turned black.

Hostas do not obey the normal rules of genetics. You might think that if a variegated hosta is crossed with another variegated hosta then the offspring would be, for the most part, variegated. However, this is not true, or at the least it is very, very rare. Hybridizers use "streaked" hostas as the pod parent for developing new variegated cultivars. These streaked breeding plants are somewhat unstable and command a relatively high market price.

But with all that said, you can still have some fun by germinating your own hosta seeds. Just realize that they will likely be a solid color even if originating from a variegated parent.

Here are a few tips for starting seed which can be a great wintertime activity. The timing on starting seed is a variable with some folks starting in October or November while others wait until February.

Start the seeds in flats with a clear plastic dome (or similar high humidity setup). Wash the flats and use a sterile soilless mix to minimize any potential fungal problems. Cover the seed lightly to a 1/8-1/4" depth. Germination typically occurs in 12 to 15 days. Target an air temperature of about 75 degrees F. Heating mats can be useful when working in cooler basement settings. Lighting is critical when gardening indoors (although not relevant to the actual seed germination process in this case). Use supplemental lighting (cool-white, fluorescent tubes) to give 16-24 hours of daily lighting following germination. Maintain the lights about 2" above the dome, or 2" above the plants once the dome has been removed.

Never let the seedlings dry out. Keep the soil moist but not soggy. Grow until the tops of the plants touch the dome. Then transplant (typically at the 2 or 3 leaf stage) and begin using a water-soluble fertilizer. How much water-soluble fertilizer you use will depend on how much you want to "push" the growth process.

Before moving seedlings to the spring garden, don't forget to harden them off - just like a tomato plant that was started inside.