

Hosta la Vista

April '07

Until we meet again



President's Message

Is it Spring already? Doesn't time fly when you have so much to do? All those jobs, all those projects and all those catalogues and magazines that were going to be finished in the dormant season will have to wait. The sun is shining and the evenings are getting longer.

The snow has more or less gone, the earth is warming up nicely and the mud season seems to have been thankfully short. Hostaphiles all over Western New York have been on the hands and knees in the flowerbeds looking for emerging shoots and mulch has been gently pulled away to see if there are any signs of new life.

But don't be fooled. Those who have lived here much longer than I will say that we are many weeks away from the last frost and mother nature could still have many surprises up her sleeve to annoy and alarm us. Reports from England suggest that plant growth there is very advanced this year and that trees and shrubs not normally in flower until May are already in bloom. Even there a late frost can arrive as late as early May so fingers and toes are crossed in gardens everywhere.

Rumor has it that the flora is fairly advanced here too so we may soon have to pay special attention to protecting our emerging plants from the frost. This newsletter contains an article that might well give you some ideas and suggestions in that regard. In the coming weeks it would be a good idea to carefully watch the weather forecasts for hints of an overnight frost and be ready to protect our emerging plants.

Sadly winter does not just bring the cold. Although a good snow cover protects our plants and keeps them nicely rested during the dormant season it also hides away the problems that may be occurring underground. Voles R Us.

As the snow disappears all too often the vole tracks and holes become visible and sometimes they lead directly to our cherished



specimens. Walter Cullerton, who came and talked to us last year, explained to us an excellent way to make a cheap and effective vole trap. I wonder if, like me, you are wishing that you had made some.

There is also a chance that what the voles have missed the deer have found. Who said gardening was easy? One great advantage with hosta growing is that our precious plants are well hidden away when the deer are at their hungriest.

But every cloud had a silver lining. Maybe you now have a little space for some new plants this spring. Our speaker at the April meeting will be able to offer us a few suggestions. Our very own Ran Lydell will give us his excellent talk on unusual and under-used shade perennials. Hopefully he will also be telling us where we might find them.

Our 'B' movie is designed to help in this regard too as it's about Hellebores and they are supposed to be deer proof. At Hosta College, our friend Oscar Cross suggested that this might not be true, but hellebores are so lovely that they deserve the opportunity to see who is right.

Assuming that most if not all of your garden has survived the rigors of winter it is still not too late to get out there and clear it up. The fall detritus can still be composted, the mulch tidied, the fallen branches and twigs moved away and the slug bait sparingly distributed. It's also a good time to be sprinkling a handful of Osmocote or similar slow release fertilizer around the crowns or your emerging plants and hungry shrubs.

In fact, there is so much to be done out there in the garden at this time of year that by the time Sunday 15th April comes around you will deserve an afternoon off spent with like minded folks in a warm and friendly atmosphere. See you there.

Mike

Advance Notice

The November Members' meeting looks like it will be an *exceptional* one.

In addition to our very special speaker, **Doug Beilstein**, American Hosta Society Vice President, Awards and Honors, there will be a light-hearted competition combined with a 'drag and brag'.

Yes the 'B' movie in November will be a **display of your photographs, slides and images of gardens that you visit during the summer.**

We want you to take lots of garden photos, especially in those gardens that you have visited because they are listed in our Open Gardens book. But please don't confine yourselves to just those gardens. They can be pictures of any garden including your own.

There will be no categories, classes or divisions, just a presentation of the pictures.

There will be loads of prizes and our special speaker will be the judge.

If that wasn't enough, Doug's talk will include information on how he raises hosta seedlings - and selects the best. So we will be giving every member who attends a large, free pack of hosta seeds.

Members will be encouraged to go home and plant their seeds, hopefully following Doug's advice.

By April 2008 every one should have a wonderful tray of seedlings to drag and brag at our meeting.

Make Your Bed

The WNY Hosta Society picnic at Ran Lydell's Eagle Bay Hosta Nursery is an annual event and very well attended, some people traveling 150 miles for their day out. Normally we have a hosta speaker but because the event is held outside it is not always easy to hear what the speaker is saying and slides are impossible.

Last year we decided to be different and have a series of demonstrations, given by members, in small booths dotted around the nursery gardens. The talks were scheduled to last for less than twenty minutes and attendees were encouraged to move from presentation to presentation as they looked at the gardens.

I managed to listen to three or four and they were all wonderful. Even after many years of growing hosta it seems only too easy to learn something new. One presentation in particular was very stimulating and I certainly learned something new. "How to make a hosta bed in the shade of trees". Ran Lydell, the nursery and garden owner (and my hosta guru), gave a practical demonstration on the correct way to make a good home for your expensive plants.

Hostas are shade-tolerant perennials and that shade is normally provided by trees. Planting hostas under trees however can cause many problems. How many of you have planted a hosta, or any other perennial for that matter, in the shade of a tree only to see it flourish for two or three years and then begin to fade away? One possible reason for this problem is tree roots stifling and eventually killing the plant.

When we dig a hole in the shade of a tree, or make a bed inside the drip line of a tree, we normally avoid the big roots and cut away the small ones. The hole we dig becomes relatively root free before the hosta is planted. All is well for a while but as we water and feed our new plant the area around it becomes very attractive to the tree and new roots begin to grow there. Soon they will begin to not only steal the plants nutrients but also invade its territory and cause it distress.

Ran Lydell tells us that we must work harder to create the perfect flowerbed under trees. He says that large hostas need between 12 and 15 inches of good growing medium whilst the smaller varieties need six to eight inches. This depth can be created by digging down or by raising the bed up. However, it is much better to do both.

Ran's suggestion is that you should dig out at least nine inches of soil putting it carefully to one side if its good top soil or dumping it if it is not. It's very much like digging a shallow pond. Remove or cut back all but the largest tree roots. Cover the base of the hole with two inches of large gravel and cover that with a layer of good quality root stopping matt. This can be bought by the yard, off the roll at good garden centers. It is better to use one large piece rather than several smaller pieces as growing tree roots seem to seek out the overlaps in the matting and try and grow through.



There is now room for six or seven inches of good soil on top of the root mat. You are likely to need a bit more depth

and in any case raising the bed will both bring the hostas closer to the eye and at the same time provide improved drainage. The shallow hole that you have dug and prepared needs to be surrounded by a raised border. This border doesn't have to be house bricks or old railway ties. Use your imagination. Create something different and distinctive.

If the new hosta bed is circular completely surrounding a mature tree it is a good idea to have an additional inner raised border some 6 to 12 inches away from the tree. This will give a clear space between the tree and the raised soil. Not only does it look attractive but it also removes from the tree the temptation to grow new roots out of the buried trunk.

Once you have a border in place you have created the ideal hosta bed and you can back fill with the soil you have removed and add a good quality topsoil or compost. The gravel under the root mat and over the tree roots will allow the roots to breath but deter them from trying to grow into the hosta bed whilst at the same time assisting drainage. The root stopping matt will further prevent new roots from encroaching and, although it will let water drain through, it will slow the drainage down a little and give your hostas added benefit. The well aerated, newly mixed planting medium will encourage your hostas to grow to their full potential and the bed should remain tree root free for many years.

But beware, giving hostas these ideal growing conditions means that they will undoubtedly grow much larger than the books and the registration information would suggest.

Editor's note: *Because the picnic "lecture stations" idea was so good, this year we've decided to enhance it by adding a dessert at each kiosk as well! Don't miss this year's picnic—mark your calendar for :*

Sunday, August 19th.



DUDE!!! POT PARTY!!!

Sunday, April 29th is 'dig up the garden day'. Kathy and Mike **need help** to dig up the plants in the garden at 494 North Street and prepare them for transportation to their new home.

We will need strong folks to dig big clumps and 'plant' them in large pots. These pots will need shifting and loading into the truck.

We will need other folk to pot-up and label all the pieces of those big clumps that 'fall' off. These will be donated to the club for future plant sales. They will need to be transported to the hoop house and watered.

We will also need folks, to distribute the beers and sodas, keep the coffee hot and pass the snacks. We could also do with some advice.

Please sign up at the April meeting or call Mike or Kathy at 655 1762.

BYOS* (Bring Your Own Shovel)



Avoiding Spring Frost Damage

By Ray Rodgers, Central Illinois Hosta Society Newsletter

The anticipation and excitement of early spring - Spring is a joyous time for gardeners, a time of great anticipation as we start wandering around our gardens looking for signs of new beginnings. Such excitement must be tempered with the realization that freezing temperatures are always a possibility until approx. mid- May in Central Illinois. The average last frost date for Peoria is May 8*. Every year, I hope spring will come in gracefully, without the major temperature swings we have come to expect. Unfortunately, this rarely has happened. Last year was a prime example. After efforts to protect my rapidly unfurling hosta leaves on a couple of occasions, I thought those days were once again behind us when we reached the month of May, only to be surprised by an unexpected (to me) frost, that damaged gardens throughout the area on the night of May 2 / May 3. Every spring, I give credit to H. ,On Stage as being the smartest hosta in my garden as it is the last hosta to emerge from winter dormancy, making it much less susceptible to frost damage.



When hostas should be protected - It is important to realize that hostas, even completely leafed out, can withstand temperatures below freezing (32° F). I have repeatedly read that hostas can handle temperatures down to 28° F for short times with minimal or no damage. During winter, if I find exposed hosta buds, I scrape a little mulch or soil mix from the surrounding area over them for protection. In very early spring, if shoots are starting to emerge, I often cover them in the same manner, in an attempt to slow their progress and provide additional protection.

If shoots are a few inches or more tall, yet leaves have not started to unfurl or are still in the early stages, and temperatures below 30° F are forecasted, I suggest providing additional protection via a choice of mulch or dried leaves piled around and over the emerging shoots. Alternatively, one of the protective methods described below can be utilized.

The more leafed-out hostas are, the more susceptible they are to frost damage. In these cases, covering via one of the methods described below is the best alternative. One must consider the uniqueness of their gardens and plant placements when determining whether to protect or not. Of course, part of the decision process is how much trust one has in the accuracy of the forecast. Isn't that a scary thought!

Plant protection - If one decides to protect, there are many options. Basically almost anything that can cover a hosta will help. It is important not to let the leaves touch the covering material as they are more likely to sustain freeze damage at that contact, if the temperature gets low enough. There are many methods for protecting your plants via covering.

Materials include:

- Plastic pots (crumpled newspaper covering drainage holes improves protection)
- Newspapers
- Cardboard boxes
- Frost Cloth (fabric material available through nursery supply companies. Search the Internet for options.)
- Bedsheets
- Bath towels
- Light blankets
- Burlap
- Garbage cans
- Bushel baskets
- Wheelbarrows turned upside down

I have also used covered sawhorses over larger hostas. Bricks and rocks are good anchors and also work well to hold down plastic pots during windy conditions. Polyethylene film or similar materials, including plastic bags, should be avoided as condensation buildup on the inside can increase the likelihood of damage to hosta leaves. These materials are also a danger once the sun comes out.

Another method is to keep a continuous spray of water on plants when the temperature is below 28° F, as water is warmer than the air.

The morning after - After all the chosen plants are protected from the impending freezing temperature (usually during the night), one must address the uncovering task the following morning. Keeping the plants covered until the temperature climbs back above freezing is the best option. But, if one has to go to work, family or neighbors may have to be called upon for help. If the forecast calls for temperatures to remain in the danger zone, keep the plants covered.

How cold is too cold - This somewhat depends on the number of hostas one has to protect. If hostas are completely leafed out and the temperature dips into the low 20s F, protective measures may reduce the severity, but it is unlikely that they will prevent freeze damage.

What should be done to frost damaged hostas - If hostas are hit by damaging frosts it is best to cut off and discard the most significantly damaged leaf tissue (sanitizing the cutting tool between plants), keeping as many of the undamaged leaves and petioles as possible to allow the continuation of the plant's food making process. At some point, if enough leaves are removed, hostas will force a second flush of leaves from smaller and previously dormant buds. This flush will likely produce smaller leaves. Even worse than hosta leaves turning to mush, is the possibility of the crown being damaged, which if not attended to, typically allows rot to set in. The crown of the hosta is the base where the roots and shoots join. Crown rot can happen in early spring when water stands around the crown or by the plant freezing after it breaks dormancy. If hostas sustain significant leaf damage, be sure to check the crown for soft areas. If discovered, this tissue should be removed back to solid tissue to prevent further rot and possibly the death of the plant.

Which hostas are most frost sensitive -Late freezes can be a problem with any variety, especially the ones that break dormancy early. The species H. plantaginea and its sports have the reputation of being the most frost sensitive. It is widely believed all fragrant hostas have H. plantaginea in their lineage, making them candidates for

PRELIMINARY 2007 Calendar

We've spent some time looking at the calendar already... all these dates are subject to change, but we thought you'd like a peek....

April 15– **Spring Meeting**

Ran Lydell: Little Used Shade Perennials

B Movie: Hellebores

June 9th - **Spring Plant Sales:** Clarence and Alden Farmers Markets

June 21-23 – **American Hosta Society Convention** – Indianapolis, IN

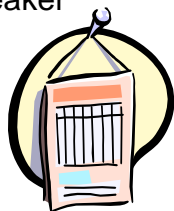
August 19 - **Picnic Meeting**, Dunkirk, NY - dessert/speaker stations... auction

August 25 – **Annual Sale** with Daylily Society
Harvey D. Morin VFW – Center Rd., W. Seneca

September 1 - **Presidents' Potluck** - Boston, NY - Socialize with your Hosta & Daylily brethren

September 22 – **Fall Hosta Forum**,
Cambridge Springs, PA – Theme: The Seven Samauri: Jon Soucek, Keynote Speaker. Also: Steve & Sara Zolock, Hostas in the Landscape; John Coble/Bob Bauer, Japanese Iris; Al Pfiesser, Japanese Maples—plus vendors, auction and Friday night dinner/speaker

November 18– **Fall Meeting**
Speaker: Doug Beilstein



FROST—continued

protection. *H. plantaginea* is one of the only species that will continue to produce new leaves all summer long. This is an advantage when the original spring foliage becomes damaged. Contrarily, I have read that hostas in the Sieboldiana Group and Tokudama Group are slow to recover from frost damage, as they tend to push only one good flush of growth in a season, also making hostas with these lineages, good candidates for protection. A few other of the more sensitive hostas include *H. montana*, *Aureomarginata*, *Sagae*, *Lancifolia* and Chinese Sunrise.

New purchases - If hostas are purchased prior to mid May, I suggest leaving them in pots so they can easily be moved to a protected area when frost warnings occur.

Is it worth the effort - Protecting hostas from freezing temperatures is certainly a hassle. Each of us has to determine for ourselves whether it is worth the effort and when to take protective measures. In my opinion, we must always be aware of the possibility of freezing temperatures and react accordingly to preserve the beauty of our gardens.



2007 HOSTA FINDER

Hosta Finders are HERE



If you ordered one, it will be available at the meeting—\$12 each

**Checks payable to
WNY Hosta Society**

APRIL MEETING

We need the following for the April meeting:

Volunteers to bring desserts/refreshments -

please call Marcia (992-4994)

Or Dolores: (693-0376)

Door prizes

We like to keep our meetings interesting... if you have something we can offer for a door prize, bring it along

YOU....

Make sure you come—and bring a friend!

Western New York Hosta Society

Mike Shadrack, President
494 North Street
East Aurora, NY 14052
h8staman@aol.com

We're on the web

[Http://www.geocities.com/wnyhostasociety](http://www.geocities.com/wnyhostasociety)

Next meeting: April 15th
Spring Meeting

Unwritten rules of Gardening

by David Hobson, from Hosta & Friends Garden Club newsletter

- ☞ The best way to garden is to put on a wide brimmed straw hat and some old clothes. And with a hoe in one hand and a cold drink in the other, tell somebody else where to dig.
- ☞ Compost is best aged a little like fine wine. I mean, would you prefer to drink a nice '97 or something that was made last Thursday.
- ☞ When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.
- ☞ A weed is a plant that has mastered every survival skill except for learning how to grow in rows.
- ☞ Spring does not arrive until the ice is out of the compost heap. Winter does not arrive until the ice is IN the compost. Until then, all bets are off.
- ☞ Any self respecting rock will break at least one shovel before accepting its new home.
- ☞ A good compost pile should get hot enough to poach an egg, but not so hot it would cook a lobster.
- ☞ Gardening requires a lot of water, most of it in the form of perspiration.