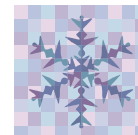




The winter meeting is just around the corner!



Things to bring:

- A covered dish to share
- Gardening friends
- \$10 annual dues

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Once again I'm disappointed with the results of the American Hosta Society's popularity poll. The top three hostas for 2007 are reliable, good looking, classic plants, that, in my opinion, have had their run at the top. To say out of all the hostas out there that 'Sum and Substance' is the one you couldn't live without shows me that people are stuck in a rut. I mean, even the sports of 'June' or 'Sum and Substance' should rank higher than the mother plants. We've got a medio-variegated ('June'), margin-variegated ('Sagae'), and solid ('Sum and Substance') as 1,2, and 3. Can you think of any newer hostas with those same characteristics that grow better, are more vivid, or have better scapes and flowers?

Admittedly, most of the newest plants are sports, but many are hybrids. The goal of hybridizing, and our society for that matter, is to introduce new and exciting cultivars to the public. Think about what your ideal hosta would be in any given hosta style. How would the clump look? How about the leaves, petioles, scapes, and flowers? We all have our likes and dislikes. (I'd love a hosta with thick, wavy, narrow leaves covered in wax, bluer than the sky. An upright, stoloniferous clump with tall scapes loaded with large, deep purple, fragrant flowers. Oh yeah, it's got to have solid purple petioles, too.)

Once you've got goals, start collecting plants that have at least one of the characteristics. Begin trying to cross them together, or with other plants that might help coordinate bloom times. Each batch of seedlings will have at least one pleasant surprise, hopefully with the desired traits. If we all try and create our dream hosta, we are bound to come up with ground breaking plants that all hosta people will love. Plus, the journey will make us more discerning hosta collectors who will appreciate the superiority in many of the new plants, and who won't choose an old standby as our favorite hosta.

Many of you picked up seeds at our August meeting, and I hope you've had a chance to sow them. Bring your seedlings to the winter meeting so we can compare our "babies". I'm excited to hang out with hosta friends as we look toward spring and enjoy delicious food, door prizes, and seedlings that will be available for everyone to take home. You'll find more about the meeting to your right and below. Or, visit the Web site for full details. (www.CarolinaHosta.org)

- Simpson Eason

WATER by Bob Solberg

In 2002, I wrote a bit about hostas and water in our fall newsletter. Much of what I included there still rings true and I have borrowed from it here, but three years and a severe drought later, I have some further thoughts. Many of you have been thinking of hostas and water as heat and drought have gripped most of the country this summer. If you are one of the lucky ones where ample rain has fallen and are not taking out another mortgage on your home to pay the water bill, then pretend it has been dry, your turn will probably come next summer.

Here are some facts, not necessarily truths, about hostas, water and weather. Wet periods are followed by dry periods and dry periods are followed by wet periods. There is no such thing as average rainfall, it is a statistical lie. In our area of North Carolina we get on average 42 or so inches of rain a year, not each year. The year hurricane Floyd invaded our state we got 42 inches of rain in a little more than a month. The North Carolina coast averages 63 inches of rain and places in the mountains average over 80 inches of rain a year. Where hostas grow wild 60-80 inches of rain a year is more the norm than 42 inches. What is your average?

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

At the end of the last century, (wow, doesn't that sound weird?), there was a chart of the annual rainfall amounts each year for the whole 100 years. The scientist in me is a sucker for anything in graph form, so with eagerness I began to study this chart. To make a long story short, there were basically no average years. The rainfall was either several inches above the average line or several inches below the line. Rainfall six inches above or below average for the year is normal, average is not. The upward and downward peaks were 12-24 months apart. There was a wet period and then a dry period. This winter the reservoirs had been full to overflowing for 18 months, so I knew we were in for some dry weather. Sure enough, there have been grassy little islands popping up in Falls Lake all summer and Cody is hoping we can "walk across the lake" like we did three years ago. I, being an adult, hope we have a hurricane instead.

So drought is inevitable as are floods. As long as the well doesn't go dry, I do not mind the fluctuations. Actually there are advantages to it not raining, like less fungus problems in the nursery. The hostas, I have discovered are not like minded. They are designed for 60-80 inches of annual rainfall and consider an average year here a drought. Add in the hot temperatures that come with cloudless summer days and our hosta friends have had a stressful year. No wonder some of them have decided to go to sleep and try again next year.

I have learned that in times of drought, especially in the spring as they are emerging, hostas will be smaller than average. In wet springs, they will be larger than average. (Maybe with hostas too, average size is just a statistical unreality.) I have also learned if the soil gets dry and stays dry, due to lack of water or tree root competition, hostas will die. Hostas may appear to be drought tolerant as they bravely hold onto their foliage until frost, but you may find out next spring that much more damage than imagined has occurred to the crown when the whole clump reverts to little tissue culture liners. Soil and humidity in the air play a role in all this of course, but they will be discussed in detail in later editions of the "Gossip Jr."

So how much should I water and when during the growing season do I stop? As your hostas poke through the ground in the spring, think of them as living balloons. In fact, most of what the process of emergence consists of is filling up predetermined leaves with water, like blowing up a balloon. The more water they get the more they expand, the more they stretch in height and leaf size. So if you want whopper hostas keep the soil wet during the spring. Irrigate especially on those glorious spring days with bright sun, a cool breeze and low humidity.

Conversely, if it doesn't rain much all winter and spring, our hosta balloons will only partially inflate. Our soil moisture levels got so low in spots this spring that our hostas expanded to only half their normal size and then just sat there. Hand watering the very dry soil really only kept the plants alive. Lack of water in spring will stunt your hostas for the whole year, at least in hot climates.

Ironically, as much as hostas love water in the spring and summer, they would rather be dry in the winter. Water plays a role in the dormancy process. The usual lack of it in the fall helps bring on dormancy and the usual abundance of it in late winter and spring helps end it. We stop irrigating our containerized hostas in October to encourage dormancy. If we do not get the usual weekly rains associated with the passage of cold fronts, then we may have to simulate that rain and water heavily for one or two days. The trick is to have our hostas full of water when the first freeze comes. If they are desiccated going into the winter then they may rot.

Too much water over the winter is a bad thing. If the ground stays frozen then the water is tied up in a solid state and the hostas stay relatively dry. If the winter is very rainy or there is a lot of freezing and thawing some hostas, especially *H. sieboldiana* and 'Tokudama' types, will rot from the top of the crown down. We actually grow our nursery stock under plastic in the winter to keep it dry! Water sometimes can be too much of a good thing.

One other caution, too much water in the spring either rain or irrigation, will stretch your hostas figuratively, to the bursting point. If they are not given sufficient water through the summer then they might crash. Don't water heavily in the spring and then go to the beach for a month!

So what is the best strategy? It somewhat depends on your climate, but probably more on your personality and your expectations from your hostas. If you are someone who actively gardens all year round, or are at least willing to drag hoses all summer, then keep your soil moisture levels high throughout the spring and as long as realistic in the summer. If extended dry weather occurs continue to irrigate but at a lower maintenance level, just trying to keep the hostas from drying out.

Keeping the soil moist all summer however may have more to do with your soil than your ability to throw water around the garden. As gardens age the organic matter added to the hosta beds breaks down as do the air spaces between the inorganic soil particles. The soil no longer takes up water as deeply and additional irrigation only leads to additional runoff. Reworking the soil now may make your hostas more drought tolerant next year.

Gardening in the shade usually means gardening under trees. Shade gardening actually demands more irrigation than sun gardening because our friends, the trees, are so efficient at stealing water away from our hostas. Soil that does not take up water well brings tree roots to the surface compounding the problem, but tree roots are a problem in among themselves. Again, reworking the soil now may make your hostas more drought tolerant by keeping their roots wetter next year.

How to water? I like to throw water all over the garden full force! In the garden we use unsightly rainbirds and water out of the pond for 20 minutes or so daily in the morning when it is dry. The amount of time you water will depend on your own set up but the recommended inch a week is a lot of water. That is four good soaking showers a week, or two downpours.

I do not like drip irrigation systems. They do not emit enough water for my taste and the tree roots always seem to find them and strangle the poor hosta for which you so lovingly intended the water. Throw the water all over the garden and confuse the trees, they can't make roots everywhere, (unless, of course, they are maple trees). Shrub mist heads work well in the nursery where the pots eagerly take up every drop of water that fountains out but they require long periods of watering in the garden and the small drops sometimes have trouble reaching the ground because of all the lush hosta foliage.

Even if you are sick of it, keep watering into fall through the first three hard frosts if necessary, but weekly, not every day. Hostas need to be full of water when they go dormant. Stressed hosta crowns are easy targets for fungal and bacterial rot over the winter. Besides those fat hosta crowns will produce fat and happy voles to feed your cats well into spring.

In a nutshell, water heavily in the spring as your hostas are filling with water. Then decrease over time the watering amounts as the plant stops expanding and then begins to contract in the fall. Just like an old balloon, hostas will sag and shrink into dormancy, only to be re-inflated to a larger size next spring.

What to do NOW to make your hostas more drought tolerant:

- **Determine how much water** your irrigation system, (garden hose?), is actually delivering to the garden . Use a rain gauge in several parts of the garden. Do you need to adjust or upgrade it?
- **Check soil for water penetration** after irrigation or a good rain. Dig a hole. Is the soil allowing the water to penetrate to the level of the hosta roots? Can you get a shovel in the ground?
- **Survey the garden for tree root invasion** sites. Dig a hole. Is there a mat of tree roots filling the soil? Can you turn the shovel over after you get in the ground?
- **Irrigate in the early morning** as necessary. If it threatens to storm and rains down the road but not in your garden, run the irrigation. Make it rain!
- **Consider resetting any hostas** that that appear to have suffered greatly during the summer. Removal of any crown rot and soft places now will result in a larger plant next spring. Use a 10 percent bleach solution to disinfect.
- **Water into the fall** especially before the first blast of cold weather. Send those hostas to bed with full tummies.



We're on the Web

www.CarolinaHosta.org

Please expedite.
Time sensitive material enclosed.

Hope to see you at the Winter Meeting in Randleman January 25th!

WINTER MEETING DETAILS

Date:

Sunday, January 25, 2009, 2:00 PM

Location:

New Salem United Methodist Church
Fellowship Hall
623 New Salem Rd.
Randleman, NC 27317

Host: Audrey Wood

Our winter meeting will be held at the Fellowship Hall of Audrey Wood's church, New Salem United Methodist Church, in Randleman, North Carolina. Plan to bring a dish to share for our annual potluck. There will be door prizes and we will have seedlings for everyone to take home.

DIRECTIONS

FROM CHAPEL HILL/RALEIGH/DURHAM:

Take I-40 West to I-85 South. Take exit 35A (US-220 South) toward Asheboro, 1.8 miles. Continue on I-73 South, 4.9 miles. Take NC-62 exit toward Climax. Turn left at NC-62, .9 miles. Turn right at Randleman Rd, 2.4 miles. Continue straight onto 220, 4 miles. Turn left at New Salem Rd. Church is on the left, .8 miles.

FROM GREENSBORO/WINSTON-SALEM:

Take US-220 South to on I-73 South, 4.9 miles. Take NC-62 exit toward Climax. Turn left at NC-62, .9 miles. Turn right at Randleman Rd, 2.4 miles. Continue straight onto 220, 4 miles. Turn left at New Salem Rd. Church is on the left, .8 miles.

FROM APEX/CARY:

Take US-64 West toward Asheboro/Pittsboro. Turn right to merge onto US-421 North, 17.6 miles. Turn left at Colonial Trading Path/Starmount Ave, 500 feet. Turn right at Old Red Cross Rd., 2 miles. Turn left at NC-22, .3 miles. Turn right at New Salem Rd, 6.3 miles. Church is on the right.