

June 2021



### *Not every leaf imperfection is the sign of a problem*

Recent postings on social media have focused on weather damage to hostas and so it seems a good subject to return to this month. We also introduce an international flavour from a new contributor...



We must all agree, in the UK at least, that this spring has been especially trying in terms of alternating and extended wet and dry periods, coupled with arctic winds. As the weather looks finally to contain some warmth we thought it a good idea to share some of our experiences with weather damaged hostas - see the side column.

#### **Backwards and forwards...**

As I send out this month's newsletter, I have just done a weekend of plant fairs. The Plant Lover's Day at Creake Abbey and The Plant Fair and Artisan Market at Helmingham Hall, which was extended into a two-day event this year, were both fantastic. The sun shone and customers were out making the most of the opportunity to buy plants. We have several planned events for June:

- **Sunday 6th June**, sees a new event: [A Garden Celebration Day](#), at Wingfield Barns
- **Saturday 12th June** is the Summer Plant Fair at [East Ruston Old Vicarage](#).
- **Wednesday 16th June** we are the guest nursery at [Fuller's Mill Gardens](#). From 2pm until 5pm you can visit the wonderful gardens and buy hostas - some would say that's the perfect combination. We are excited to finally get the chance to visit, albeit in the guise of working. As ever, we are often too



### *Gardening in Maine*

This month we are delighted to introduce a newsletter reader from Maine, Lenore Tipping, who has agreed to contribute to the newsletter to give us all an insight into growing hostas in her corner of the USA.

The photos in this newsletter are all views of Lenore and Tom's garden in mid-May, a wonderful location but not without its own challenges. We hope you enjoy this collaboration over the coming months.

busy at this time of year to take time out so it is great to have this opportunity.

- **Saturday 26th June** is the [Plant Fair at Moggerhanger Park](#). We are delighted this event is going ahead again.

You can find out more information on events we are attending via the [Shows page](#) on our website and we hope we get to see some of you out and about over the summer. Don't forget the nursery is also open every weekend until the end of July - [find out more here](#).

Well, that's about all from us locally so now we would like to introduce an international element to our newsletters. The rather beautiful garden photo at the head of the newsletter belongs to our new contributor, Lenore Tipping. Following a brief conversation Lenore has agreed to contribute to the newsletter to give us all an insight into growing hostas where she lives. Here she is, in her own words:



### **Hello gardeners,**

I've been reading Mickfield Hostas newsletters for years and recommending the site to gardening friends. I'm delighted to add a piece to the newsletter!

I garden in Orono, Maine, U.S.A. with my husband Tom. Orono is a pleasant town of nearly 11,000 people, approximately 38 miles from the Atlantic coast, and is home to the flagship campus of the University of Maine. We moved here 27 years ago from central Illinois, both starting jobs at the University of Maine. We were fortunate to find a home within walking distance of the University, with a 3/4-acre lot on the shore of the Stillwater River. Our two sons grew up here in Orono and went to separate colleges in Canada, and both have returned to raise their families here.

### ***Weather damaged leaves***

Over the years we have come to expect no two springs to be the same, but there are similarities.

We haven't suffered anywhere near as much damage as we might have expected in previously cold springs. This boils down to the fact that, aside from the plants affected when we changed tunnel covering, everything has emerged when it was ready. Earlier on this year we asked the question of whether it is a good idea, or desirable, to 'bring plants forward'. Having not done so for the past two years, we have suffered very little weather related damage. Pest damage has also been minimal as it has been far too cold for most pests to be active. We expect that to change now the weather is warming up.

Weather damage can take many forms, from scorched leaves to rot, here are a few of the issues your plant could be suffering from as a result of the weather:

**Tipping:** early emerging leaves, which are very delicate can often 'tip', become brown at the ends of the leaves. This is often the result of needing to water whilst suffering overnight frosts. Watering from below can mitigate much of this damage. It can also help prevent spear rot, when water sits within the newly unfurling spears only to freeze overnight. This can result in damage to the crown too, so we try not to water from above when there is the threat of frosts.

**Bleaching:** although there are many cultivars that develop their colour as the season progresses, sometimes a cold start can make

Our property was quite neglected when we arrived. Over the years we've removed fallen branches, dug out brambles and invasive shrubs, amended soil and added garden beds. The land nearest the river, which we call our "bottom land," floods every spring for a week or more, as the snow melts in northern Maine and the April rains come. This area is filled with ferns which love wet feet and come up nicely every year. Just beyond the ferny area the garden beds begin, filled with more than 300 varieties of hostas and some other perennials as well.

We take a natural approach to gardening, leaving many volunteer trees to grow where they will. We also welcome meadow rue, bleeding heart, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and other volunteer shady perennials. Varieties of ferns tend to pop up everywhere, and I'm forever pulling them out of beds and giving them to fernless friends. The property has some remarkable giant White Pine, Maples, and Oaks which create wonderful shade for our hostas. We use natural borders such as rocks and logs to define garden areas. I enjoy designing garden "rooms," each a bit different from the others.

Orono is in plant hardiness zone 5 (latitude 44.89 N), which can be somewhat challenging because of the shorter growing season and the need to grow only very hardy perennials. Hostas are the perfect choice here and they thrive in our garden. This year we had a mild winter and the hostas emerged earlier than usual. As I write this in mid-May, I very much enjoy watching them unfurl!

Best to all,  
Lenore



Thank you Lenore, I am looking forward to comparing notes with you in the future and it is so encouraging to see the

the leaves look like they have been stripped of chlorophyll. For most, this problem goes away when the weather warms and the leaves appear to 'colour themselves in'. A lack of food can also cause this effect but don't forget not to over feed as some cultivars show this characteristic and are glorious for it. We have 'rested' several varieties as they are taking some time to look as they should but this is not something to worry about.

**Cell damage:** very cold rain and hail can damage individual cells and cause what looks like rust. Sometimes hail can pass right through and shred them. Rust spots can also be the signs of fungal infections. Too much wet and/or humidity is not good for hostas, especially if they are quite tightly bound in a pot. Lack of airflow can encourage fungal problems and if a part of your plant is starting to rot you may not be aware until it is too late, which is why it is good to divide hostas that have become too densely packed. This can also happen in ground grown plants so when they emerge in the spring just check to see if the spears are touching each other. If this is the case then schedule in a dividing session to help the plant stay healthy.

#### **Is it Host Virus X (HVX)?**

I have read quite a few social media strings recently where weather effects and the signs of HVX could very easily become confused. Not every leaf defect is a sign of HVX but given the proliferation of hostas now available, there is no doubt the problem is becoming widespread.

hostas are growing so well alongside well established trees.

One of the important aspects to gardening, which Lenore mentions, is hardiness. This is something that constantly amazes me about hostas. As the effects of climate change challenge established ideas on what can grow where, it will become an ever more important consideration. The importance of a strong root system is the key to growing any plant and it becomes even more important during times of extreme weather. Without a strong root system no plant can survive or develop resistance to viruses.

Recent research has suggested that ash trees can develop tolerance to ash die-back, a fungal disease which was estimated to have the potential to destroy 95% of the UK's population of ash trees. If we had destroyed all of the ash trees, in a blanket move to halt the spread, we wouldn't have been able to discover that tolerance is possible. Early predictions point to the ash making a full comeback in around 50 years, not bad in tree lifetime terms. Tolerant trees will be safe from this particular fungal infection and might stand it in good stead against future problems.

AHS research has discovered that certain branches of the hosta family are more prone to HVX than others, which might suggest a form of tolerance in the other parts of the genus. Is it too much of a leap of logic to suggest hostas could become HVX tolerant if allowed to live with it for a while?

In summary, to avoid the risk of buying a plant with HVX, buy from a reputable source. If an outlet cannot tell you the name of the plant it is selling, you can be sure they wouldn't have a clue how healthy it is either!

Happy sunshine gardening, at least for now!

**Team Mickfield Hostas**

Having read through the research done by the American Hosta Society (AHS) and applied our own experience, we feel a more pragmatic approach is to isolate any suspect plants and watch them. HVX is spread through the sap of the plant, so you are safe to do this simply by isolating.

HVX acts a bit like a cancer and can lay dormant for many years before manifesting. Several years ago we took a plant out to the Wisley flower show as part of our display. It was a beautiful [H. 'Mildred Seaver'](#) we had added to our collection from a local fellow hosta specialist in the early years of our collecting. This plant hadn't seen fresh soil in many years and so the re-potting and pampering she received from being part of our display might have been a shock to her system. The following spring she looked completely awful with the cell crushed look of an HVX victim. Rather than destroying the plant we popped her into isolation. Two years later she was back to her beautiful self with no trace of the worrying cell damage.

I don't think you can necessarily tell whether a hosta is suffering from HVX simply from a photo, so if you are really concerned, you can buy testing strips to find out. Before doing any of that I would like to suggest you take a look at the [AHS research into HVX](#) to understand it better and help guide you to making a decision.