

October 2024



Seasonal highlights

October is usually my month to reflect on the season and so I invited Lenore to do the same.

The photo below shows our stand at Holkham Hall back in June, a new event in our calendar this year:



Greetings hosta gardeners,

With leaves just beginning to turn color here in Maine, it's a good time to reflect on the highlights of the passing gardening season.

Some hostas here are looking a bit tired; others still look lovely.

I recall they were so fresh in spring when first emerging, and became gorgeous as they grew and expanded. Cherishing that beauty is my highlight for the season.



You may recall that we had a serious deer problem and finally had a fence installed this past spring. For the first time in many years, our hostas were safe from deer! They grew, and thrived, and were beautiful. No bite marks in the leaves, no empty petioles sticking up, no destruction. Just lovely hostas, looking as they should.

Autumn is here

I decided to stop propagation a couple of weeks ago as the hostas have decided autumn has arrived.

The speed at which they all begin to follow one another in changing colour means there is a different scene every day. The plants are marching towards dormancy earlier than normal due to the early start to the season back in the spring.

The collection tunnels positively glow on bright days towards sunset.

Start to think about draining any plants you have had sitting in water trays, especially as it has become very wet again for many areas. Don't forget about your plants though, and check on them throughout the winter



Our deer-detecting cameras no longer show deer munching our hostas. Now we see them walking outside the fence, sometimes eating ferns, but not attempting to enter. I've begun to enjoy watching a doe come by with her two fawns!
Happy autumn to all,
Lenore

Thank you Lenore, and I hope I can return to enjoying the sight of deer when we have completed our own fencing project. Your hostas are stunning, and the colours are so vibrant – smashing.

Plant Fairs

This year we attended two new plant fairs, at Wyken Vineyard and Holkham Hall. Both were really good and we hope to be there again in 2025. The main issue we have is the number of events we would like to attend but date clashes force us to be selective, which is what happened with East Ruston. We still attend their June event but the new spring fair clashes with Wyken. We love going to Woottens but their event clashes with Norfolk Plant Heritage's event at Hethersett and, as a Plant Heritage event we feel we should support it first – decisions, decisions. The results of these deliberations will be shared on our events page in the spring and we hope to see lots of you again.

Our first non-exhibiting year

This was our first year away from exhibiting in 30 years, and it was indeed a good move from the respect of the time it takes to prepare, attend and repair from such events. I have missed the buzz of a show but I do enjoy showing people around our nursery, so here is where our attention needs to be.

Despite no longer exhibiting, I am still involved with the Horticultural Exhibitors' Association (HEA) as Vice-Chair for Floral. I also run the website and attend regular meetings with show organisers and exhibitors. This brings me back into contact with the show scene as my role is to help both show organisers and exhibitors get the most from

to ensure they do not dry out. Leaving them in a sheltered spot in the garden is the best thing to do as they can still benefit from rainfall and they do like to be frozen for a period too over winter. This also helps kill off some pests, or at least disrupt their breeding cycles.

Remember, when checking on your plants, move them and see if there are any snails trying to hibernate among them whilst you are at it.

Nemaslug available in garden centres

Following on from last month's newsletter, the news that Nemasys are retailing through garden centres will make it easier for you to get hold of their various biological control offerings.

Given the proliferation of slugs this year, it may be worth considering using a biological control to get the population under control.

Originally only available online, Nemaslug is very effective in reducing the slug population but, because they are a ground operating control, they are less effective on snails, which tend to be more of a problem for us, alongside vine weevil.

Netting your pots/containers

Over the course of the many years we have been growing and exhibiting hostas, customers routinely share their tips for tackling various pests.

Where we have tried the efficacy of these tips and found

their respective businesses through exhibiting. Last month I was at a meeting with the RHS Tradestand organisers and Exhibitors discussing Chelsea, Hampton Court and Wentworth logistics. In October we have an informal show organisers meeting where HEA Associate members meet to share information and best practice to help shape future events. These mixed gatherings are really useful as a forum through which we can pass on customer feedback, as well as our own observations and perspectives.

Although we put a lot of effort into creating events customers wish to attend, we can never predict the level of customer engagement. Economic pressures aside, the attendance at flower shows is greatly impacted by the weather. If advance ticket sales are not sufficiently robust then reliance on impulse ticket sales can have very mixed results, especially if the weather is too hot or wet. These are material considerations that affect everyone involved in staging events and these days there are ever more events being staged to distract from the attendance we may hope to see at a flower show.

Not only do we growers become obsessed with the weather to grow our plants, we are also at the mercy of the weather when trying to sell them. Every year is different and presents its own challenges but there is a limit as to how we can plan ahead when such an important aspect to our business is beyond our control. It doesn't stop us trying though!

Plant sales in general

Horticulture is a challenging business and has been badly impacted by many events over recent years. Alongside the rest of the economy, horticulture has suffered and some of the effects are only now rippling through, such as extra rules and restrictions on international trade, an aging horticultural population, the peat ban, and so on.

In my role for the HEA, I get to speak to tradestand exhibitors as well as floral, and all reported a slower year. Plant sales depend greatly on discretionary spend, which has been stretched for many this year, but at least our customers are still buying our hostas.



them to work, we have reported on them, and here is another. Nikki Badgery, a fellow newsletter subscriber, reminded us of a trick we have heard of several times but not tried ourselves:

Use fine net to line the bottom of a pot, covering the holes, before adding medium. This helps prevent pests getting into the pot through the holes to lay eggs. It still allows the holes to function as they need to.

Nikki has found it works well for her, so why not give it a try when you next re-pot your plants?

You can use anything from old tights to net curtains, which you can probably pick up at a jumble sale or charity shop.

Thank you Nikki.

We find that standing our pots in water during the season helps prevent pests getting into the base of the pots but occasionally the trays do dry out so this would be another line of defence. Also, the pots are not standing in water during dormancy and recent winters have been mild enough for many pests to continue to be active throughout the year, so the net would help over winter.

Our main problem with this trick is being able to line thousands of pots so I am tempted to give it a go by targeting red-stemmed varieties, which vine weevils tend to be drawn to. I suspect the majority of vine weevil ingress we suffer is through the tops of the pots because they really hate water, but it is worth a try.

The weather this spring may have been unappealing to many but the hostas loved it, and responded to all the rain with tremendous growth. I had to start staking the large and giant cultivars for Plant Fairs right from the start of the season, which gave rise to the joke that we had developed climbing hostas!

This year, once again, we have been able to supply other collectors, institutions and Plant Heritage National Collections with plants they cannot source elsewhere. A good deal of these sales are through mail order, which continues to be reasonably bouyant despite the doom and gloom of the new government's rhetoric. Roy does a fabulous job of packaging (see photo below) and it helps a lot that hostas can be sent bare-rooted. Not only does it avoid bottom heavy parcels, it helps us keep post and packaging costs at a reasonable rate.



Nursery visits

Once again we have welcomed individuals and groups to the nursery to view the collection and indulge in some retail therapy. We had planned to open in May but the advanced emergence of the hostas allowed us to open in mid-April.

It is always a delight to welcome visitors to the nursery, many are regulars but this year we welcomed a lot of first time visitors. I never tire of seeing their first reactions to the hostas and then welcoming them back in subsequent years. This year the tunnels were even more impressive and chock-a-block full, so much to see and enjoy. We work with them every day, so tend to see the faults and blemishes so it is such a joy to see the delight and pleasure on the faces of our visitors.

A huge thank you to everyone who has bought plants from us this year. You make all the work worthwhile and your continued enthusiasm for these wonderful, hard-working plants, makes our job so satisfying.

Speak soon,

Team Mickfield Hostas

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The nursery is now closed for the season

We took down our signs mid-month, after our last planned nursery visit. This year everything finished early, so the fact that the hostas were looking autumnal wasn't a problem.

Autumn is the best time to plant perennials as they get the chance to get established before next season, so mail order will continue for a few more weeks. If you were thinking about a late order, best get in there quick. Anything we send out from now on will have their leaves removed as they will only go over whilst in transit and it is easier to plant them when not top heavy with leaf.

Talks

I finally gave the last talk, which had been postponed over Covid, in April. Who would have thought it would take so long to clear the backlog?

Talks are a good way to introduce gardeners to hostas but these days at least 50% of my audiences are already growing them, which is brilliant. I have been giving talks for the past 10 years and have made quite a few return trips, which is gratifying.

If you would like me to come and give your gardening group a talk about hostas please do get in touch – details of my fee, and subjects covered, are [on the website](#).