

September 2024



I'm giving up growing hostas!

This is a sad thing to hear especially when hostas are so very rewarding and easy to grow but it is understandable when they can get ravaged almost overnight.

I am going to be controversial now: sitting back and letting your hostas get eaten is a choice – you can halt the damage, or at least mitigate further damage in several ways.

I have lost track of how many times I have written on this subject, but it amazes me how mud sticks – slugs love hostas don't they?

Well, no, as it happens slugs and snails hunt by smell for the delicious decaying enzymes that rotting vegetation gives off – that's what they love. Anything else, remotely edible, they may come across as they carefully lay down their slime trails is also on the menu. Therefore, if they find your hosta first, why bother spending valuable energy on laying more slime or going any further? They use these carefully laid slime trails to navigate back to that food source, so disrupting it is a good idea. Hostas don't give off decaying enzymes until the leaves start to die back, or the flowers go over – which is another good reason to dead-head regularly. In all likelihood it is other planting that is attracting the slugs and snails but then you are much more likely to see damage in your hosta leaves so understandably believe that is all they are eating.

Immature snails have been a problem this year, which, for us, means the adult snails have probably been seeking more shelter from the persistent rain in order to lay their eggs. I have been finding clusters of baby snails in some varieties that haven't been moved for a while.



Battling larger pests

Lenore recently had to resort to fencing her garden to mitigate deer incursions and we are planning to do the same, but need to clear the land again first. Until then...

Only yesterday Roy discovered two tree guards relocated part the way up the trees they were protecting. Deer are the only animals able to do this as they have antlers and the height needed to achieve this. They then make a mess of the exposed tree bark, harming its chances of survival.

Although we have never had any hosta damage from rabbits, they are a nuisance with other planting, and the same night, whilst the deer were rearranging the tree guards, the rabbits decided to gnaw their way through a length of hose to get at the water. This created a couple of holes, which had become fountains when Roy checked on them. Why they had taken time and effort to achieve this rather than simply lapping at the pools of water

Get ahead of the game – why wait until the hostas are out to do something about slugs and snails, after all it is much easier to find them before the garden erupts into its riot of foliage and provides all the hiding places any self-respecting slug or snail could wish for.

Act fast – the minute you discover any damage seek out the culprit – if you can't find the snail, get rid of the trail. Visit our FAQ page to find more hints and tips. Don't just give up at the first sign of damage as it will just get worse if you don't intervene. Remove badly damaged leaves and the plant will instantly look better.

Learn about your garden space – take time to learn where slugs and snails hide and keep a check on them. Why not leave a few up-ended pots or bits of debris lying around in the cooler, darker parts of the garden as perfect hibernation sites? Return to them periodically over winter/early spring and bingo, no need to hunt.

Yes, we suffer slug and snail damage every season despite all our efforts to avoid it. We are realists, we know we cannot hope to prevent at least some incursions. We are surrounded by open farmland on 6.5 acres of nursery space which is largely a wildlife haven. Over the years we have encouraged hedgehogs, frogs and birds to consider our nursery home. Latterly these little critters have been joined by larger slug and snail eating predators such as foxes and badgers. However, we still suffer imbalances in the slug and snail population, which is usually exacerbated by the weather. This year has been wet (until June), following a very mild winter, which is perfect for slug and snail breeding activities. It has indeed been more difficult to mitigate damage this year but, because we never let our guard down, we have still managed to keep our plants looking good. If we just threw in the towel and gave up growing hostas because pests eat them, where would that leave us? Slugs and snails are eating other stuff too, so they would be damaging the alternative plants too surely?



Visitors to our nursery are often surprised to learn we do not have a secret staff helping us do all the work. Roy and I work tirelessly year-round to ensure our hostas look good enough to eat, but remain

around the base of the trees, who can guess.



Perhaps they couldn't get there because the deer were busy rearranging the guards?

We suspect the pesky rabbits may have been attracted to the sound of water travelling through the pipe, in much the same way as sharks are attracted to undersea cables due to electrical soundwaves generated by the optical traffic. Apparently, the sharks have sensors which can detect this electrical energy and believe it means food, so these days cables tend to be better insulated, or buried into the seabed to avoid this damage.

Thank goodness we don't have to worry about sharks too but we may have to get some reinforced hosepipe, or bury it. But that is a lot of work for a system that only needs to be in place for a couple of years until the trees are well established.

largely uneaten. Roy is a night owl and routinely succeeds in catching pests in action on forays after dark. I spend a lot of time tidying and cleaning during the season and because we both spend a lot of time with all our plants, we can spot damage and act accordingly.

We adopt a zero-tolerance policy and dispatch what we find – a quick squeeze of thumb and fore-finger with vine weevil and a stamp of a boot on a slug or snail is a quick way to do the job.

I will continue to shake my head at the pride some people show in flaunting photos of their wrecked hosta leaves and how they have allowed such damage to go unchecked. Rather than taking photos perhaps a few minutes on their hands and knees searching for the culprit may be time better spent?

At the end of the day, they won't have killed the plant, it will return again next year despite the lack of care taken to look after it – they are tough old things.

And, just to allay any fears, we are not about to give up growing hostas as we do not blame them for our own shortcomings in failing to deal with the pest problem adequately.



The photos dotted around this issue show we still have quite a lot of colour despite the rapid onset of autumn. We suspected the season would end early after such an early start. The leaves have been busy all season providing food for the plant to use to create next season's growth and we have noticed lots of fresh new shoots developing in more recently propagated plants. This all bodes well for next year so fingers crossed we actually get a proper winter to break the breeding cycle of the most annoying pests. In the meantime visit our [FAQ page](#) for more hints and tips on the subject.

Speak soon,

Team Mickfield Hostas

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Last events of the season

On a much more positive note, we have two more plant fairs to attend before the end of the season:

Saturday 7th September

Somerleyton Hall

[Autumn Plants and Crafts Fair](#)

Sunday 15th September

Helmingham Hall

[Autumn Plant Fair with Artisan](#)

[Market](#)

At the Nursery

We continue to be open until the end of the month by appointment – [see website](#) for more details.