



Hosta collecting and care.

Keeping Track

Often people don't realize they are starting a hosta collection till they are already there. While we remember (at first) who everyone is, losing track of who's who is a common problem.

To get an idea of what you have, visit a good nursery or www.hostalibrary.org to see Hosta and also check when they were released for sale. It is likely the Hosta you got across the fence from your neighbour 5 years ago was not released 6 years ago.

A dedicated notebook with careful records is one way, or a looseleaf binder (where sheets can be inserted alphabetically). Information such as; Name, Date purchased, notes on eventual size, performance and so on can all be put on the sheet.

A more modern solution would be a spreadsheet in excel, with as many headings as you like.

Before heading out on a collecting trip, it is good to know what you already have. Many collectors come with a printed sheet showing what they have, which we can then compare with our availability.

A small flattish riverstone can be written on with a SHARPIE marker, then left writing down beside the plant. This will help you know who's who when in the garden. The aluminum plant stakes from Lee Valley are also useful using pencil (hint, write name on underside as well) although they can easily get raked out of the garden.

Miniatures

Miniature Hosta are a fun way to collect while not taking up large amounts of space. Be careful not to put them where they will be covered or crowded out by larger Hosta. They are less tolerant of wet feet than their bigger cousins so a slightly sloped area can work well. One hole from a slug can take up a whole leaf on a tiny variety such as Chirp, so careful attention to slug control is a good plan.

Slug Control

Hand picking;

Icky but a good strategy for small infestations. A headlamp, and a cup of water with alcohol and soap to drown them in are all you will need, slugs and snails do the damage at night, so this is an evening chore.

Safer's Slug Bait;

Needs to be re-applied, however it is safe for birds and mammals. We have had only limited success with it (mostly due to our heavy overhead watering schedule).

Ammonia solution;

A solution of 10% household ammonia (that is 100ml per liter) can be sprayed on to the ground as well as the foliage of Hosta in the evening. This has been very effective for us. When sprayed too early in the evenings some spotting has occurred on larger leaves (that is more fully opened. The spotting effect can be overcome by washing plants off in the morning. We spray 3 times, every 7 days at the beginning of season. Make sure to spray soil as well.

Beer;

Traps can be made using beer, brewers yeast or simply yeast that has been proofed with sugar and warm water. We put some in mason jars with half lids, then lay them on their sides so slugs crawl in and drown. The yeast is what attracts them.

Physical Barriers;

Ground egg shell, stone dust or other sharp items, as well as copper can keep slugs from climbing on to Hosta, but will not keep them from travelling up nearby plants and transferring.

Hosta Virus X

www.hostalibrary.org/firstlook/HVX.htm

What it is (and Isn't)

Hosta Virus X (HVX) is a disease that affects Hosta. There is no known cure, however it is relatively easily contained and spreads only by sap to sap contact (no air-borne vector). Certain varieties of Hosta have been identified which have large percentages of the virus (Gold Standard for instance). Plants bought from box stores after 2000 are the most likely candidates. The two classic symptoms are; Inkbleeding from veins and mis-shapen areas between veins. Some Hosta have a natural bleeding look and are not infected.

Hosta can also show many other problems in their leaves that have nothing to do with HVX. Late frost's, sunburn, waterspotting and physical damage can all affect leaves without being virus.

When it shows

HVX usually shows up later in the season, with August being a prime time for us to evaluate our stock. Spring damage almost always has other causes.

Hygiene

This virus is transmitted primarily through cutting the plants. Contact of the infected plant's sap with sap of a healthy plant will infect the new plant. This can happen whenever cuts are made and the instruments or hands are not disinfected afterwards. Dividing hostas, removing bloom scapes, removing leaves, stepping on them, even accidentally running the lawnmower over them can and will spread this virus. It survives only in living plant tissue and dies without a host. Plants in pots may be simply disposed of or burned. Plants in the ground should be dug carefully as to get as many roots as possible, and the spot should not be replanted until any remaining roots have died and rotted away.