



# Hosta Happenings

**East Tennessee Hosta Society**

**October 2020**

## President's Message

Sandra and I thought we would do some leaf peeping in the Smokies on Saturday the 17th. It was a perfect day with perfect weather. We thought because of the pandemic that it would be quiet so we could relax and enjoy the day. Well – what a cluster. We have never seen so many people in the Smokies before – it was packed. Lots of time stuck in traffic so this took the shine off the day. To top it off we got our timing off by a week or so. Most of the trees at Newfound Gap had lost their leaves but some still had colors. Most of the color was around the midway mark with the lower elevations still to come. We rarely saw a TN tag – all out of state cars. Maybe that is telling me something. It was good to get out for the day though.

In this newsletter is an article from Bob Solberg on watering your Hostas which I found very informative. I remember a couple of years back when I had forgotten to

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## Annual General Meeting

This year's annual general meeting, when the officers' election occurs, will be via Zoom on the 15<sup>th</sup> November at 2:00 pm. Mary Albrecht, the communications director, will email with information about how to log into the meeting. You will be able to dial in using a cell phone or connect with a tablet or computer using video and audio. If you haven't used Zoom, you will need to download the app to your phone, tablet, or computer.

turn off the drip feed on the Hostas for a week or two and boy did that make a difference to the size of my Hostas that year. A few years ago I built a new Hosta garden under some trees and for the first year or two they did really well. Since then they have struggled. I determined that they weren't getting enough water because of moisture competition from the trees – even though they are under automatic irrigation. Last week I removed two Sugar Maples and one Sweet Gum tree from this area but left the white Oaks to provide shade. Hopefully now they will have a chance at capturing more of their share of water. The removal of the trees will also provide more light to the area that may also help. The proof will be in the pudding come May next year.

I am not sure about you all but we have had a heck of a year for insects and diseases. I've had mature native trees diseased and some have died and we were also plagued with ants. We are thinking that this may have been due to the mild winter last year. The raccoons terrorized my Hostas for a while and left a complete messes to clean up. Sandra has had to deal with more small hive beetle problems than normal with her bees. Some of her tomatoes got a fungus and also had to battle horn worms. The weeds this year were prolific and healthy so we were lucky that we had extra time to spend in the garden.

## 2020 Officers

President Fred Anderson  
Vice President Bob Goeltz  
Treasurer Gina Buffum  
Secretary Cheryl Ferrone  
Communications Mary Albrecht (plantprof@gmail.com)  
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So far I haven't heard of any club members that have contracted Covid-19 (thank goodness) so I presume that you are hunkering down in your garden and staying safe. To help with our social needs, we have been involved with several "Happy Hours" where you have no more than six people and are socially distanced apart. People bring their own drinks and snacks and usually lasts for about an hour or so. We found it a great way to catch up with people.

I hope that you are able to join us next month for our AGM via Zoom where we get to catch up on the latest and elect the executive team for next year. You still have time to volunteer to be on the team that runs the club – we are always looking for new blood and fresh ideas. Please give this some thought.

Warm Regards  
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## Watering Hosta

*By Bob Solberg, Green Hill Hostas*

As we all know, hostas need light, water, nutrients, and air to grow. Of these, water is probably the greatest of them all. A season of excessive spring rains in the Midwest and a yearlong East Coast drought have taught us many new lessons. And those of us who ventured

across the Rockies now know how well hostas can grow in an arid climate.

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 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 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 the 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 winter, then they may rot. We watered into December last year because of extended drought conditions.

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.

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## November-December Gardening Activities

This is the time of year we get to relax, enjoy the holidays, and focus on indoor plants.

Christmas cactus will be on the market or you may be enjoying the one you've had for years. Christmas cactus left outside during the fall will help induce flower bud formation. The cool nights and shortening days are what's needed. They are epiphytic cacti from the



coastal mountains of southeastern Brazil. They originate in areas that are between 2,300 and 9,100 feet in elevation where it is relatively cool, shaded, and high humidity. They handle the cool nights on our deck; just don't let them freeze. When brought indoors and allowed to flower, don't place them where they get the full blast from forced air heating systems, common in today's homes. Keep them in a bright location, but not necessarily direct sun. Remember, they originated in shade.



Amaryllis bulbs will become available in the market for holiday forcing. Unpotted bulbs need to be rehydrated. Place the base and

roots of the bulb in lukewarm water for a few hours. Then, plant the bulb up to its neck in the potting mix, being careful not to damage the roots. Press the soil down firmly to set the bulb securely in place. Locate the potted bulb in a warm place with direct light since heat is necessary for the stem development; ideally, 68 to 70 °F. Water sparingly until the stem appears, then as the bud and leaves appear, gradually water more. Bulbs will take from 7 to 10 weeks to flower from planting.

According to Dr. Mary Meyers, University of Minnesota Extension, unlike some other bulbs, amaryllis do not require a rest or dormant period. They will bloom again if allowed to continue to grow. From her publication [Growing and caring for amaryllis](#), she explains:

“But bloom time can be controlled by allowing the bulb go dormant (stop growing) for a period of time. During this resting period (dormancy), plants use very little of their energy reserves.

- After bringing the potted amaryllis indoors, store the potted plant in a cool, dry, dark location such as a basement or closet.

- The temperature should be around 50-60 degrees.
- Let the leaves become brown and dry before cutting them off.
- Leave the potted bulb in the dark for 8 to 12 weeks. Do not water during this time.
- Inspect the bulb periodically for mold or mildew. If found, treat with a fungicide or consider throwing away the bulb.
- If new growth appears during this time, remove the potted bulb from the dark location and place in a sunny window. Trim off any dead leaves. Water and fertilize.
- If after 8 to 12 weeks, no new growth has appeared, remove the potted bulb from the dark and place in a sunny location.
- Water and fertilize as noted above in After-flowering care.
  - This process will force the plant to bloom providing the bulb has sufficient energy to produce a flower stalk.
  - Usually one or more flower stalks appear first,

but occasionally they are preceded by leaves.

- Flowers usually develop in about 4 to 6 weeks from dormant bulbs.
- Blooming can be timed around specific holidays and events.”

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## Fall Tour of the Buffums Yard



Hostas of course - 'Wu Hoo' (left) and 'Blue Ridge' (below) just two examples.



Japanese maple bought from the moving sale of Elin Johnson

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## East Tennessee's Iris Breeder Passed Away

We learned of the passing of Tom Parkhill, an avid iris grower and breeder. His full obituary is available at <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/knoxnews/obituary.aspx?n=tom-parkhill&pid=196935056&fhid=4199>

We want to recognize his contributions to gardening – the introduction of 19 bearded iris varieties listed with the American Iris Society and winning the 2012 International Wister Medal at 88 years young for the best tall-bearded iris in the world – 'Chief John Jolly' (left), named for his favorite Cherokee leader. Celebrate his life each spring at the UT Gardens to see his iris



What's an East Tennessee garden without a few camellias?



Or a turtlehead (Chelone 'Hot Lips', left)?

Or something for the birds?



## Debunking Gardening Myths

### Myth #8: Coffee grounds make plants grow better.

Coffee grounds add nitrogen to soil and suppress some plant disease. They work best if added to the compost pile where they can break down.

When sprinkled over beds, they really don't add a significant amount of nitrogen or disease suppression because you are not adding a significant amount at any given time. Sprinkling over the soil makes us feel better because we are not throwing organic matter into the trash and, ultimately, the landfill.



Online articles say not to add coffee grounds to a compost pile because the acidity will prevent the microbial population involved with compost decomposition from working properly. The recommendation is that coffee grounds make up no more than 15 to

20% of your compost pile. For example, the compost bin shown measures 23 1/2 inches square by 32 inches tall. It holds 75 gallons. Fifteen per cent would be 11 1/4 gallons. That's more than two 5-gallon buckets of coffee grounds. You know how much coffee you drink and if your coffee grounds would quickly fill your compost bin.

As to adding acidity, one source said too much of a good thing can be a problem. They recommended not adding more than 1/2-inch layer of coffee grounds.

So, adding coffee grounds probably does no harm nor is it greatly beneficial to the garden. Most of us don't drink enough coffee to generate the volume of grounds that would be detrimental to the compost process. So, adding coffee grounds to compost bins or gardens is a good alternative to the landfill.

Mary L. Albrecht, Communications Director