

July 2023



## *Whether the weather, whatever the weather...*

As we leave the hottest UK June on record all evidence points to a changing climate we need to be mindful of on a local level as well as globally, and share ideas where we can make a positive difference. You cannot prepare for every eventuality but you can make adjustments that help prevent weather related damage to your hostas, and this month we look at a few ideas you can use.



### *Adjusting to the new norm*

One thing is certain, weather changes are happening across the world. We are fortunate to live in a temperate climate but this balance is under threat as we increasingly face extended periods of wet/dry weather.

This means we need to adopt strategies to deal with such extended periods, especially as it appears our utility companies are struggling to build resilience into their systems to cope.

Not only does the weather affect us all directly, it affects migratory movements and can aid the more rapid spread of viruses and produce new vectors for the spread of diseases.

These issues came to the fore at the 2023 American Hosta Society National Convention, which Lenore and Tom attended back at the start of June, and from where she now reports.

### **Greetings Hosta Gardeners**

Tom and I recently returned from the American Hosta Society convention in Ames, Iowa, in the U.S. midwest. We had a great time there! We connected with friends, met many wonderful people, listened to very interesting presentations, and toured 10 exceptional gardens.

The tour gardens at the conventions are always beautiful, always inspiring. But these were particularly inspiring, because all were

### *Helping the wider climate*

Despite the miniscule use of peat within horticulture, as compared with other reasons to extract peat, we decided over 20 years ago to go peat free.

Readers of our newsletters will know the issues we have faced in our attempt to achieve peat free status and we are sometimes taken to task over not making more of the fact that we operate entirely peat free. It was a conscious decision we made many years ago to do our bit alongside using organic principles before it became the big issue it is today. Yes, we could choose to over feed our plants and intensify our production but we learned quickly that this only resulted in stressed plants, which did not grow characteristically.

One of the most pleasing

recovering from the loss of substantial trees. The Iowa Derecho (inland hurricane) of August 2020 produced winds of more than 200 kilometers per hour, destroying many magnificent trees throughout the area. In addition to this destruction, Iowa currently has an invasion of the emerald ash borer, killing established ash trees. Tour garden owners spoke of losing large numbers of mature trees, some right before the tour, with others beginning to die. All the gardeners on the tour had worked hard to restore their gardens, and found creative ways to provide needed shade. Their resilience and restoration skills were amazing, and the gardens were fabulous.



Tom and I learned a lesson from this convention: Mother Nature rules. But if we remain calm, and go with the flow, our gardens likely will survive. This lesson is critical to us at present. While enjoying our summer garden, we also battle deer in our hosta beds, and another creature biting the leaves off at the base (rabbit?). Also the emerald ash borer is established in Maine, both north and south of us, and we have more than 25 mature ash trees on our property. We must learn from the resilience of the Iowa gardeners.

I'm pleased to share some photos from the Iowa convention tour. Happy gardening!

Lenore



It is so sad to hear about the emerald ash borer causing such widespread problems and we will all keep our fingers crossed for Lenore and Tom's trees. In the UK we are still suffering from the introduction of *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* from Asia. This is the fungus which results in ash dieback back and has decimated ash

comments we hear from visitors to our collection is how can anyone say all hostas look alike. We usually say it's because we are too mean to feed our plants but the honest answer is that it doesn't do them any favours to over feed.

### Flowering

Another consequence of climate change is confused plants.

This year it seems the flowers have arrived quite early despite the cold wet spring holding things back.

The rest of this column will be devoted to hostas flowers – I didn't have time to note which variety is which so you will have to visit to see more.



populations across the country. We still have a healthy ash tree at the nursery, which has shown a new lease of life since we had the large poplar tree removed. It is still a little lopsided due to the effects of being so close to the poplar but it is recovering well.

### **What we are doing to combat climate problems?**

The most pressing matter for us was to replace the polythene covers to the tunnels with horticultural net, which we completed last year. The results have been fantastic but it hasn't all been positive. The main issue has been soil compaction as a result of heavy, persistent rain over winter and into spring. Roy decided to install an inner level of net to help diffuse the rainfall and initial tests seem to have proven the effect, but we won't know if this help reduce the level of soil compaction until another winter has passed.

The cold wet spring also resulted in leaf damage in a few areas of the tunnels, very hit and miss but there must have been some areas getting more of a deluge and the inner net cover might help mitigate that. The weather was definitely tricky this spring but then it is a tricky time when the fresh young growth unfurls. If water gets into the furls, and freezes, it wrecks the first leaves. Also, if water held on the leaf surface freezes it can cause what looks like rust spots, which are unsightly. Often the damaged leaves protect the underlying ones to some extent but this spring the cold and wet persisted for a longer period and so there was less protection. It has only really warmed up during the last month so we were able to start removing the damaged leaves and all the fresh new growth is now starting to emerge.

### **What you can do in your garden**

Sheltering your hostas is the most important consideration. Shade is also important but sheltering your hostas from drying winds can be just as important as shading from direct sunlight. Hostas will transpire just as much water through their leaves in a windy spot as in a sunny one. Such conditions will rob the leaves of their colour producing papery brown areas. If this is happening to your plants then remove the damaged leaves and move the plants into a more sheltered position.

Seasoned gardeners will know all about micro-climates and how other plantings and structures can provide shelter in a garden. However, if you are new to gardening, or are embarking on a new garden, then it is worth spending time looking at how wind and sun affect the different parts of the garden. Remember if you start your hostas off in pots it enables you the flexibility to move your plants about until you find the perfect spot.



Interestingly, most of the flowers out at the moment are white, or the palest lavender.

Shelter can be achieved in numerous ways, popping plants into the lee of a building, shed or a large shrub will do the trick. The image below from another Convention garden shows a shady slope underneath a wooden structure that has been used to great effect.



If the spot is too sunny then consider providing shade. There are lots of ways to do this from temporary awnings to specially constructed pergolas. If you have a south facing garden then you will know how intense the sun can get, so care about your plants as you would your own skin – there are not many plants that can tolerate such harsh conditions without some form of damage.

If you would like to create a shady pergola then you can always put a form of net, or strapping over the top until such time as climbers can produce the dappled shade you are looking for. It doesn't take long – my own pergola is now so effective it has to rain really hard to wet the ground underneath.

I like the hexagonal tiered arrangement captured by Lenore in one of the Convention gardens. It is obviously under a shade structure of some sort but why not make use of a troublesome area of your garden where you cannot grow anything, perhaps due to neighbouring trees, with something like this? You can selectively water everything rather than worrying about the plants arguing with established thugs. Don't forget to stand your hosta pots in shallow dishes and keep them topped up with water to help maintain a good moisture level in the soil at the bottom of the pot as well as the top – this will also encourage your plants to seek the water from below and this helps build a strong root system better able to cope with extremes.

Hope this gives you some ideas on how to create a better environment for your hostas at home.

Happy gardening

Team Mickfield Hostas

*Copyright © Mickfield Hostas 2023, All rights reserved.*



We have two more [open weekends](#) planned for this season, so why not take the opportunity to give us a visit and spend some time walking though the collection – it really looks lovely this year.

If you can't make the trip, here is a video tour of Tunnel 3 with the plants fully out – click on the image below to view

