



**Welcome...** to the October issue of our newsletter in which we look at hints and tips to over wintering your hostas. Many of the tips we suggest would translate well for many other garden plants but are particularly applicable to hostas - just remember, none of this is rocket science, just simple things to remember.

## What a glorious autumn we are having at the moment

- although the weather we have had this year has presented challenges to all gardeners across the UK, at least we can delight in a stunning autumn as a result. Our hostas are finally giving way and the gold leaves are turning brown and withering. We have just completed our autumn splitting session and so can leave the plants in peace over the winter. We generally advocate spring splitting of garden-based hostas due to the fact that it is physically easier to see what you are doing without all the foliage and the split plants have the whole season to settle. However, we do not get much opportunity to split in the spring due to the start of the show season so most of our splitting is done at this time of the year. As this has been a brilliant year for hosta growth we have had a significant amount to do, handling several tonnes of growing medium mix in the process. We can't wait to see the emerging shoots come the spring...

### So what to do now...

Try to resist pulling the leaves off your hostas until they actually give way without a struggle, even though they may look a bit of a mess. This will ensure you don't inadvertently damage the plant crown. If you wish to tidy up then simply cut the leaves back for now, a couple of inches above the ground.

Apply a dressing of your favourite mulch to your flower beds but before you apply your mulch, scatter a few slug pellets around the base of your hostas. The slugs that cause the damage to your emerging shoots are those that hibernate under the soil over winter so you may catch some of the little blighters as they take a last feed before retiring. Over the winter, the mulch will help retain moisture in your flower bed and prevent your hostas from becoming too dry.

*Your hostas may be at risk of drying out, even over the winter*

Do remember that if we experience a warm, dry winter then there is a risk that your hostas could dry out so keep a weather eye and water lightly if necessary. This is a particularly important tip for pot-grown hostas as they are more likely to quickly dry out in such conditions.

Conversely, we can experience so much wet that there is a risk our plants, not just hostas, will rot in the soil. If your hostas are in pots then we advise you lay them on their sides, perhaps at the back of your flower bed, to avoid becoming waterlogged. This will also prevent frost damage to your pots.

*Lay your pots on their sides to avoid the contents becoming water-logged*

**Don't worry about frost** unless it is severe and deeply penetrating, in which case hostas are not the only plants that will suffer. Hostas go dormant over winter and frosts are part of the dormancy cycle. Many of our sales plants are frozen to the

**This month** sees the 20th anniversary of the 'great storm', which hit the south east of the UK in the early hours of 16th October 1987.

It was an event that we would not forget in a hurry and one that caused so much destruction.



We were woken by some terrifying sounds early on that morning and spent several hours huddled in sleeping bags in the hall, which was the quietest part of the house.



benches in the tunnels over winter, yet they emerge in the spring all the stronger for this. It seems that hostas positively benefit from cold winter hibernation. The only exception to this may be miniature varieties in exposed locations so if you have a cold greenhouse or cold frame then you might be better popping your hostas in there over winter for peace of mind.

### Battle preparations...

If we have yet another mild winter, as many are predicting, then be prepared for a significant pest problem in 2008.

If we don't have a sufficiently cold winter then we will see the early emergence of slugs and an even greater proliferation of snails and vine weevils. In our experience the only really effective way to deal with pests is to act early so we reiterate our advice from the [February issue](#) of the newsletter with the addition of the following points:

**'Much Ado About Mulching'** - don't underestimate the power of mulch. Not only does it supply much needed nutrients to help enrich your soil, it protects young shoots from early frosts and, more importantly where pests are concerned, provides a valuable food source. Slugs and snails hunt by smell and love decomposing vegetation more than anything. A tender emerging shoot will only do if nothing better is on offer. So try not to be too tidy in your garden and leave some tasty morsels for the pests - it works!

**'The Taming of the Slugs'** - now before you exclaim in horror and cross yourself vigorously knowing we are about to advocate the use of slug pellets, stop and consider what you actually need to achieve with your pest control. Slugs and snails breed like you wouldn't believe so whether you prefer them to drown in a bowl of beer or be crushed under the wheels of passing motorists, they must be culled. However, not all slugs and snails are vegetarian monsters so you only really want to search and destroy those intent on scoffing your lovely hosta specimens. Therefore, we recommend a targetted approach or 'strategic campaign' if your guns are really out:

- Start using your chemical (metaldehyde-based) or organic (iron phosphate-based) pellets early on in the year, when the first warm weather hits.
- Use your pellets wisely, don't scatter widely and wantonly, remember slugs and snails hunt by smell so you risk attracting more of a problem than you need to solve.
- Keep your pellets dry by putting a teaspoonful of pellets in a jar (on its side) hidden among the foliage. This keeps the pellets effective for longer and any slugs in the vicinity will snack on the them in preference to your plants.
- Good luck!

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## PSST... now you can get 'organic' slug pellets too.

For the past couple of years we have been using a ferric phosphate control - [Advanced Slug Killer](#), which we have found to be as effective as the traditional metaldehyde-based form. Contact [Growing Success](#) for more information.

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**Next month:** [Size matters: we return to our work on classifying our collection...](#)

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 30 years of experience with the Hosta genus. We are constantly learning and refining that knowledge and would welcome any suggestions that readers of this newsletter would like to make so please [contact us](#).

As dawn broke and the wind began to die down we surveyed the wreckage of our newly erected tunnels:



The damage assessment concluded that the force of the wind, as it was deflected over the top of the first tunnel, was sufficient to lift a jumbo jet...



... consequently the rest of the tunnels didn't stand a chance and were torn apart. We often wonder where the polythene ended up.

[Take a look here](#) for more images.