



Board of Directors

President

Gwen Wheeler
(816) 228-9308
gmwheeler@juno.com

VP & Membership

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(816) 781-8542
drtangel@kc.rr.com

Secretary

Cerise Harris
(816) 353-8905
cjharris@kc.rr.com

Treasurer

Charlene Wendel
(816) 313-2907
gramcracer@hotmail.com

Newsletter

Penny Balfour
(913) 722-4925
rbalfour@kc.rr.com

Website

Pat Jerez
(816) 729-9124
dimedame@sprintmail.com

Program Coordinator

Gayle Alley
(816) 697-2007
jpagha@gmail.com

Hospitality

Carmen Martinache
(816) 741-5837
bcmartinache@gmail.com

Member-At-Large

Annella Kuhar
(913) 888-4258
churharr2@yahoo.com



Heartland Hosta & Shade Plant Society

Fall 2013

President's Message

The summer is flying by and time is approaching for our Fall meeting. We're excited to have Bob Olson join us as our speaker! Bob resides in St. Louis Park, MN and has been very active in the AHS as President and most recently, as Editor of their very fine publication: 'The Hosta Journal'.

Our meeting is scheduled for Saturday, September 14th, with sign in at 9:30AM and meeting and program beginning at 10AM at the Faith Lutheran Church, 67th and Roe, Prairie Village KS. Be sure to join us for door prizes, potluck and visiting, in addition to Bob's delightful presentation.

One of the door prizes will be Bob's namesake hosta, Bob Olson!! We'll have plants for sale, including a few new hosta varieties from Naylor Creek and some lovely ferns, as well.

The summer garden party hosted by Gloria and Craig Bennett was delightful and well attended. A big thanks to them for agreeing to entertain all of us. Their yard and home are lovely!

Garden tours are such fun! Being a Master Gardener, I was involved in their tour as a worker, in Alley's and Martinache's as a guest and hosted three in our garden. Nice Spring rains helped make

the gardens lush and lovely.

The Loose Park Project is taking shape, slowly. Bob and Mary Lou Vorheis, owners of Blue Ridge Nursery and long time members of HH&SPS, are donating a number of the plants. Thank you to them. Call me to volunteer; we'd welcome your help with this project.

Matter-of-fact, your Society could use your input of thoughts and of time in various capacities. Give me a call if you are ready to get more involved!! Hint: We are looking for a new Secretary!

Your Society will soon have a new website up and running. The name will change slightly so check it out at www.heartlandhosta.org

We've been waging war on Roly Polys! Never before have they been such a nuisance in our garden. This year they attempted to destroy everything in sight and it has taken drastic measures to control their voracious appetites!

Looking forward to seeing all of you at our September meeting!

For more info call me my cell at 816-213-098 or home – 816-228-9308

Gwen

Hosta Meeting Saturday September 14, 9:30 a.m., at Faith Lutheran Church, 67th & Roe, Prairie Village, KS. Potluck following. Meat, drinks, and tableware are provided.

DILETTANTE SYSTEMS:



If there were a “best” way of controlling slugs there wouldn’t be so many ways. Over the years one has seen scads of articles written on this subject, many of them very imaginative. This summer I heard of more new schemes than ever before. Perhaps this is because I had

significant problems with these unspeakable pests and was looking for alternatives to failed strategies. When my current system didn’t appear to be permanently eliminating the slugs I looked for a new method and there were many to choose from.

There are the two standard techniques: beer and Bug-geta (or some other protein-baited methaldehyde compound). The beer is placed in a shallow receptacle and the slugs are attracted to the odor of the malt or hops or whatever it is that slugs like and once inside the slippery-edged container they drown. My neighbor and I tried this “politically correct” means of dealing with the hated gastropods. Initially, he had far better luck which I attributed to having a better bait he used Bud Regular and I was using Bud Lite. When we went to check the bait traps he had half a dozen dead slugs while I had half that many. So I switched to Heineken’s and the race became more even. However, he then put his bait station close to his compost bin and they must have been breeding like rabbits in there because he again claimed a larger body count. The bait used and the placement seem to be the key factors with beer and traps. The traps themselves are of lesser importance. On the market are a lot of different styles of upscale containers in which to place the beer, and you are charged accordingly. Usually the pricey ones have clever tops (I guess to keep rain out of the beer) and cute names such as “Slug Pub”, although I prefer blue-collar names like “The Terminator” or “Pit of Death.”

Beer wasn’t the answer. The slugs would still eat the hostas; we could only hope to keep the numbers down by knocking of the ones with serious drinking problems. Still, environmentally safe methods have a certain appeal and I was anxious to try them before resorting to poison. Walter and Jean Rideout from Madison, Wisconsin, are gentle, nature-loving folks. They shared their slug secrets with me. They, too, disparage the use of chemicals; so the good doctor and his wife don caps with flashlights attached (like miner’s hats) and go into the garden at night armed with ‘Dust Buster’ hand-held vacuum cleaners. Zz-la! Zzla! They suck up each slug they see with the

vacuum. The neighbors thought this activity bizarre at first, but after a while accepted it as part and parcel of the Rideouts’ eclectic philosophy and interests. The Rideouts said it was fairly effective, but I didn’t think my wife and neighbors would speak so kindly of me (and also, I didn’t want to fight mosquitoes and raccoons in the dark) so I eschewed the vacuum.

The “Atom Bomb”

At the Great Lakes Regional “Hosta College”, Clarence Owens, the biology teacher from Michigan, covered the topic of slugs in his course on Garden Denizens. He scoffed at trying to control a serious outbreak of slugs with the commercially available chemicals, but he said a substance called measurol did work. Unfortunately, measurol has been taken off the market. It is available for use if you are raising ginseng root. Apparently even the EPA is overruled by the purveyors of performance enhancers. So if you want to get some serious slug poison you need to know someone with serious ginseng root contacts. I did.

Axel Troedsson showed up at my place one day with a small plastic bag full of the stuff that looked like dry dog food, only it was white. He said it was what I needed to clean up those ugly holes in your hostas.” He put on some rubber gloves and went around the yard like Johnny Appleseed scattering this white stuff under plants and next to flat stones and near drainpipes-about a dozen spots in all. Before he left he said, “If this stuff doesn’t work we’ll use pulped Lutefisk.”

When I came home from work the next evening I went to see if anything had happened. Had it ever! Wow! There were dead slugs everywhere-twenty or more by many of the piles. Those slugs hadn’t moved more than an inch after coming into contact with this white stuff. It was lethal.

Then I started to worry. There were several dead angleworms and a sow bug or two that hadn’t moved more than an inch after hitting the white crumbly bait, either. I called Axel and had him read me the label over the phone. It was measurol all right, but only a 2% concoction. The antidote was atropine! That’s the stuff they were issuing to the troops in Desert Storm that were going to be exposed to Iraqi nerve gas. I called some people I knew at the Poison Control Center. Measurol is an organophosphate, they said, just like the nerve gas. But it isn’t nearly so lethal and in a 2% mixture it isn’t the worst stuff you could think of. They said anyone using it would need gloves and should be quite careful, but it will break down after a



2013 Events

September 14
Heartland Hosta Fall
Meeting & Lunch
(Faith Lutheran Church)

2014 Events

March 22
Heartland Hosta Spring
Meeting & Lunch
(Faith Lutheran Church)

May 10
Heartland Hosta Annual
Plant Sale
(Faith Lutheran Church)

June ?
Heartland Hosta Annual
Garden Party

September 13
Heartland Hosta Fall
Meeting & Lunch
(Faith Lutheran Church)



good rain or two and won't build up in the soil. The human risk isn't the problem; it's concern about birds and fish in the "run-off" area. If people were to use it in broadcast fashion it could cause a serious environmental hazard.

After two treatments with the measuroil it seemed to end the epidemic. Several of the plants sent up a new flush of leaves that remained almost untouched the rest of the summer without further treatments with anything. And copper collars didn't seem to cause any harm to the plants they were protecting. So I guess it worked out okay. I only wish I had been a little more scientific about how I had used these various treatments.

The Best of the Rest:

I talked with a number of people about slugs this summer and many told of controlling them with unusual methods. Frank Greer, the pediatrician-plantsman-scientist, from Madison, Wisconsin, tells of visiting a vegetable garden in the midst of a slug devastated community in Vancouver. It was spared thanks to a herd of vigilant geese that was kept penned with it. The birds literally had slime oozing from their bills and flowing down their faces and necks from the scores of slugs they would nail on the dead run while patrolling the perimeters of the fenced plot. Perhaps this is not what you'd want in your yard, but the method appears to be extremely efficient.

This bird patrol concept must be the rage on the West Coast. Charlie Purdyman and Jay Hyslop, the people at Walden West, told me how for a while they were trying bantam roosters to monitor the rows between their lined out hostas. They were almost as good as the geese and easier to handle. But Purdyman couldn't stand having them under foot all the time and they eventually divided the garden into a traditional side (Charlie's) and Jay's fowl free-fire-zone. They've given up on the chickens now-too much collateral damage- and are back to where they started.

Robyn Duback, another west coast slug sufferer (but not one to suffer indignities silently) shows the giant Pacific slugs no mercy. At the 1993 AHS Convention in Iowa City she told a mesmerized hosta klatch tall tales of mammoth banana slugs attacking her garden. Even the stoutest of the gardeners were taken aback as she recounted the lurid details of how you need to treat the slugs like vampires if you want to keep them away. Robyn captures them by night and leaves them out in the midday sun with wooden stakes driven through their bodies. "That finishes 'em off," she counsels.

Meanwhile more genteel methods are used in the Midwest. The prime example is softhearted Russ O'Harra who uses toads which neighborhood children

bring him. He even went so far as to build a little house for them near a water pool-sort of a toad hotel-hoping to make them content and willing to stay.

Dr. Jim Wilkens, the star of Victory Garden, uses a newspaper (he says the Wall Street Journal works well) folded in half and soaked in a bucket of water. He puts it down in the garden at night, picks it up in the morning looks for slugs on the underside. Then he crushes them with a hemostat. (He seemed like such a gentle man.)

Larry Clemmons, an accomplished hosta grower from Dubuque, had an almost slug-free gorgeous garden last year while many of his friends from nearby towns were being overrun. Unlike the beer and light-weight chemicals they were using, Larry was spraying the hosta once a week or so with a dilute solution of plain old ammonia. The slugs hate the ammonia and the plants love the nitrogen. He uses a regular inexpensive tank and nozzle sprayer and went over and down into each plant-and he has a lot of them. He sprays the hostas with a dilute (4:1 or even weaker) solution of water and household ammonia in the evening once a week-more often in the spring or with a lot of rain. It would take him no more than two hours a week and there were almost no slug holes. The folks visiting from Iowa City which was being inundated by mollusks were astounded by his lush foliage just a few miles away and many have adopted his system.

Perhaps the most interesting new approach was mentioned by Warren Pollock at the Winter Scientific Meeting in Chicago. He reported that he had it on "good authority" (he read it in The Times) that enterprising people in Great Britain have found a slug-eating nematode which doesn't harm plants. Test are being run to see if it will be better than the current means of handling slugs. Some of the tests are being conducted at the University of Minnesota Arboretum, but there entire Hosta Glade was hit heavily by hail earlier this year and I wonder how they will be able to gather good data. Nonetheless, the "battle of the worms" has a good ring to it. I hope it works out.

So, as you can see there is a lot of action in the war on slugs and perhaps in a few years we will have a single "best method" for dealing with them. More likely, we'll have a number of systems to hold the slugs down (ammonia, flesh-eating nematodes, armies of toads and copper barriers, etc.) and some reliable/safe chemicals to use in a crisis-or better yet, breed slug-resistant hostas. But until then we continue to learn a lot about ourselves and our innovative and imaginative friends who must be thinking of slugs constantly to come up with these bizarre and wacky (and successful) ideas.



Heartland Hosta Society Dues

To ensure your continued newsletter mailings, please make sure you're current on dues. If you're not sure, check your mailing address label for the year next to your name. You are paid up through that year. We ask that you prepay at least 2 years at a time.

Join the American Hosta Society

The publications alone are worth the annual dues. Visit the AHS website (www.hosta.org) for the latest membership options.

Join the Midwest Regional Hosta Society

The MRHS (including both KS and MO) publishes two newsletters a year, holds an annual Summer Convention and a Winter Scientific Meeting. Dues are only \$10 per year payable to MRHS.

Send dues to:
Kristine James
523 E. Calhoun Street
Woodstock, IL 60098

Heartland Hosta & Shade Plant Society
Penny Balfour, Newsletter Editor
4912 Pawnee Dr.
Roeland Park, KS 66205



Membership Report:

Heartland Hosta & Shade Plant Society has 165 members on its roster and had 30 new members join our club this year.

We welcome these new members. If you have any changes to your address or email please send that to me via email me so I can make corrections to the roster.

drtangel@kc.rr.com
Nancy Erwine
Membership

