

I predict the most popular herbaceous perennial plant found growing in flower borders throughout Central Nebraska is Hosta.

Hosta is actually a genus name for a group of shade-loving foliage plants called hostas. I'm quite certain it would be difficult to find a garden without this versatile Asian native. Somewhere I read this incredible group of perennials has more than eight thousand named varieties. Its lush foliage in diverse colors, heights and textures has captured gardeners' attention throughout the world. Hosta varieties run the gamut in terms of size. Small, tiny miniatures grow as little as two inches in height and four to six inches in width; whereas, gargantuan hosta are known to reach four feet across and five feet tall.



Hostas were introduced to the United States in the early 1800's and have remained popular ever since. I readily recall Mother growing hostas in her flower borders. I hate to admit it, but in my early years of gardening, I wasn't that impressed with Hosta. Conversely, Rita has always had a passion for hostas and through the years, her enthusiasm has rubbed off on me. We now have an assortment of hostas planted throughout our landscape, and each year we add new varieties.

One of my biggest disappointments with hostas occurs at this time of year. In late August or early September, it is not uncommon to see hostas' leaves tattered and riddled with holes. For me, such an image destroys their aesthetic appeal, and I know many gardeners feel the same as I.

Recently I received a number of calls from individuals wanting to know what they could do to improve the appearance of their damaged Hosta plants. Whether damaged by environmental issues such as hail or from slugs or deer, the damage is unattractive. Furthermore, by this time of year, most Hosta plants have finished blooming, or are nearly done blooming, and their remaining attached flower stalks supporting withered spent flowers



adds to the unsightliness.

A common question I receive is, "Would it be okay if I were to cut back the ugly leaves in my hostas?" For years, I've been answering that question with a resounding, "No." Now is not a good time to remove the damaged leaves of Hosta. No matter how unsightly, those tattered remnant leaves still undergo photosynthesis, a necessary food making process, adding to the strength and vigor of the plant. If removed, no new leaves will form for the season.

However, removing the spent flower stalks is another story. It is perfectly safe, and it adds to the aesthetics of the plant to remove the faded flower stalks. Furthermore, their removal allows for water and nutrients to be redirected to other parts of the plant.

In the future, it would be wise to pay closer attention to the leaves earlier in the season. Prevention of hosta leaf damage is the best control.

More than likely the holes one is now witnessing were created by slugs. To determine if slugs are the cause, one should inspect the plants at night with a flashlight. During the evening, slugs are most active-chewing away at the leaves. Closely examine the undersides of the leaves as well as their tops. *Sluggo* is a granular product one could sprinkle on the ground around the base of hosta plants. It is designed to destroy slug populations; however, the toxicity of this product will have less effect on mature slugs. For now, the best plan is to physically pick the slugs off and destroy them. Luckily, slugs are not nearly as fast moving as some other pests in the garden.

Unfortunately, as unsightly as they are, damaged Hosta leaves should not be removed until after the killing frosts of autumn arrive. One should then remove the dead, unsightly foliage and destroy it. The good news is, next spring, beautiful new Hosta leaves will emerge with no holes!