

# **THE CHATTANOOGA REGIONAL HOSTA SOCIETY**

## **THE HOSTA CONNECTION**

**FEBRUARY 4, 2012**

**12 O'CLOCK**

**THE BARN NURSERY**

**SPEAKER – CRAIG WALKER**

**HOSTAS AND PRENNIALS**



### *Notes from the Editor*

Is it spring already? Or is 'old man winter' waiting to hit us with a cold cold February and March. These past years I've planted for winter interest in the garden, now when I walk through the garden it's alive, lenton roses, arum italicum, holly ferns, Christmas ferns, foam flowers, ginger, heuchera, several evergreens, vines that hold their foliage, and the structure of perennials that were left for the birds.

The AHS Convention in Nashville is June 13 – 16, the website is [www.hosta2012.com](http://www.hosta2012.com), I have been sending you registration forms, and information as I received it. To get the best discount you need to pre-register by January 31. Johnny and I are planning on going and staying the entire time, this will be our first Convention, it is quite overwhelming - making a schedule to see and participate in everything. Our Club is sponsoring Bob Solberg, The Nashville Garden Club has asked for volunteers to help make the Convention run smoothly, Johnny and I have volunteered. I'm planning on entering in one or two exhibits with the help of Roseanne. For those of you who are not aware, Roseanne is a Hosta Judge, (something you can't volunteer to do, you have to earn the title). At the April meeting, Roseanne will tell us what the Judges are looking for and how to prepare our hostas for show.

It has not been decided if we will have a June meeting, if there is enough interest in going to the Convention and meeting as a group representing our Hosta Society we will meet in June to coordinated our plans with each other.

Another reason to attend the Convention is there will be lots of vendors – selling hostas and hosta related items. So bring your money and have some fun.

## To Fertilize or Not to Fertilize?

That is not the Question

by Warren Pollock

The question is not whether to fertilize hostas. To achieve and maintain their luxuriant splendor, hostas need fertilization. The question then is when to fertilize and what fertilizer to use.

Hostas benefit from large additions of organic matter, such as garden compost, leaf mold, well-rotted manure, composted pine bark and peat moss, in the planting hole, especially if the soil is heavy clay or light and sandy. If you have such enriched soil, then perhaps you only need an annual application of aged organic matter, an inch or two thick, in autumn.

Indeed many growers find this autumnal nutrient source satisfactory; their hostas thrive superbly. Nevertheless, a large number of keen hosta growers, perhaps most, consider it highly beneficial to apply a granular or liquid fertilizer, or both during the early season.

Bob Solberg of Green Hill Farms in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, has made some astute observations on the subject and is an enthusiastic advocate of heavy spring fertilization.

He argues that hostas feed heavily when the leaves are coming up in the spring. So he recommends applying a regular granular fertilizer such as 10-10-10, or even 20-20-20, just before the shoots poke up from the ground. If you miss that timing, then apply when they are emerging. He further recommends a second application in about mid-May.

If you use a slow-release fertilizer such as Osmocote, he says to apply it about two weeks after the plants emerge from the ground. And if you use a liquid fertilizer, use 20-20-20 once a week when you start to see the plants.

From my experience, Bob's message is correct. For years I have used lawn fertilizers such as Scotts Turf Builder and Vigoro applied just before the shoots are emerging or soon afterward. They have about 30% nitrogen so I use them at half the recommended rate on the bag. Some contain iron, as much as 2%, that helps green up the leaves. I fully recognize that these and other such premium lawn fertilizer are not the least expensive granular fertilizers on the market. Since I water heavily, regardless of rainfall, I like them because they are especially formulated or processed to be long lasting. They release only about 15% of their nitrogen content soon after being watered in and then continue to release the remainder more-or-less gradually for several months more. Agricultural and garden-type 10-10-10 and 20-20-20 fertilizers can dump most or all of their nitrogen quite quickly when copiously watered.

“(On the subject of cost, I always find it surprising that some avid hostaphiles will balk at spending \$10 for a bag of fertilizer, but will readily shell out \$40 and more for a single new hosta, and they will complain about their watering bills and the price of good slug baits, yet continue to buy more and more hostas.)”

In addition, I apply a 10% nitrogen, liquid fertilizer to the ground, as I want the emerging divisions to have that full nitrogen fix when they need it initially.

Concerning Osmocote, there is another slow-or-timed-release fertilizer, Dnamite, that is recommended. Nursery people tell me it is better than Osmocote as it doesn't release its elements quickly in hot weather if abundantly watered.

Bob Solberg further stresses the importance of additional feeding later in spring. "Once the leaves emerge, they grow rapidly," he points out. "A supplemental feeding around May 1<sup>st</sup> will help produce a good second flush of leaves. This feeding should be a high liquid foliar feeding that will be taken up rapidly by the plant."

"Apply lightly – just enough to wet the leaves," he says. "use a minimum of 20-20-20. Add a pinch of Epsom salts for magnesium, which helps the plant use nitrogen. Magnesium (also) promotes a darker green leaf."

Most liquid fertilizers of the Miracle-Grow and Miracid type are blue colored. A dye is intentionally added to color the powder and solution. I find the dye can leave stains on some hosta leaves, especially if the liquid is applied on a hot, sunny day. There are liquid fertilizers that are not colored. Some nurseries and garden supply stores carry them: they are worth seeking out.

For organic gardeners, there are many fertilizers from which to choose. Milorganite is a bagged, treated sewage sludge that can be purchased in many garden supply stores. Liquid fish fertilizers are also available. Soybean meal contains about 8% nitrogen and is especially liked by some for its high protein content. Cottonseed meal contains about 6% nitrogen. Another organic fertilizer is chicken manure pellets, which can be very high in nitrogen, as much as 20% depending on the diet fed the poultry.

Bagged, composted cow manure is readily available at garden centers and nurseries but it contains only about a 1/2% nitrogen. And of course there is old manure from barnyards and stables. Keep in mind that these types of fertilizers can take weeks for the organic nitrogen to be converted into soluble chemical form that the roots can absorb. It generally requires a fairly warm soil temperature for this to occur. Therefore, there may not be a large amount of "usable" nitrogen when the hostas seem to need it most: when the leaves are just emerging, unfurling and growing to their full size.

From DVHS Newsletter – Spring 2010

There is one thing that Warren Pollock left out: Bob Solberg advises that once you start watering your hostas - you have to keep watering them the whole season, Bob also said he uses Miracle Grow for tomatoes.

### **WATCH OUT FOR THE MARCH MEETING.**

Ruth Bumgardener from Mouse Creek Nursery is our speaker for March, she always has an excellent program. The March meeting will be held at Bachman on Signal Mtn, I'll have the directions in the next newsletter.

**REMEMBER THE FEBRUARY MEETING IS AT THE BARN NURSERY, YOU'LL HAVE TO ASK WHERE THE MEETING WILL BE. CRAIG HAS HAD SEVERAL PROGRAMS FOR US IN THE PAST YEARS – THEY WERE ALWAYS INFORMATIVE. See you Saturday, February 4<sup>th</sup>. Shirley**