



# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

central illinois hosta society  
[www.cihshostaclub.org](http://www.cihshostaclub.org)

october 2009  
volume 15, issue 8

## president's letter

First, I want to thank Shirley Metz for organizing our banquet last month and getting Mark Zilis to be our speaker. This is the last newsletter of the year and my last president's letter to you. It has been such a pleasure to serve as your president for the past two years. When I attended my first CIHS monthly meeting 12 years ago, I never would have imagined that I would I serve on the board in this capacity. One of the best parts of being president has been working with the other people on the board. Everyone is so helpful and responsive to the needs of the association. The board works very hard to arrange the meetings and plan our special functions. I want to thank the CIHS board again for all that they have done! And it is great to see several new faces on the board next year. I urge you to seriously consider being on the board in the future. Also, think about opening up your garden for a monthly meeting. New gardens, old gardens, small or big - it is so much fun to see our members' gardens. I hope you will continue to enjoy your gardens this fall and winter. See you in 2010!

Warmly,  
Golda Ewalt, CIHS President

## companion corner: oakleaf hydrangea

**Botanic Name:** *Hydrangea quercifolia*  
**Size:** 6 to 8 feet high and wide

The Oakleaf Hydrangea is a stunning plant and, because of its four season interest, a great addition to the landscape. A dramatic, showy shrub, it is a prolific white-flowered bloomer requiring pruning only if it gets too large for its space. One of the few hydrangeas

native to the United States, it was first discovered in Georgia and named by John Bartram in the latter half of the 1700s.

The 'oakleaf' part of its name reflects the shape of its large leaves which resemble those of the red oak. The leaves are yellowish green on top and downy-white underneath. The leaves turn colors of red, orange, bronze and burgundy in the fall and remain on the shrub through most of winter.

The Oakleaf Hydrangea sprouts shoots from underground stolons. The young stems are covered in a felt-like light brown bark, while the older stems have attractive cinnamon-tan-orange bark that shreds and peels in thin flakes.

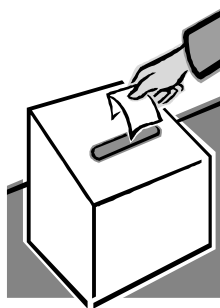
The large ice cream cone-shaped blossoms open white then acquire a pink tint in middle summer and remain attractive even after they turn golden brown in winter. Unlike *Hydrangea macrophylla*, the flower color does not vary with the soil pH. The Oakleaf can be purchased in two forms: single blossom types such as the native variety or cultivar 'Snow Queen' or the double blossom types such as cultivar 'Snowflake' or 'Harmony'. The blossoms make attractive arrangements in both summer and winter.

The Oakleaf tolerates more sun than other types of hydrangea - morning sun with afternoon shade is best. However, the shrub does not tolerate 'wet feet'. Good drainage is needed so root rot does not develop. Plant in early summer or late fall; transplant when dormant and leaves have mostly dropped. Oakleaf hydrangea blooms on old wood. Prune, if necessary to maintain size, in summer before August as bloom buds for next year set during June and July. Consider placing this care free shrub among your hosta and enjoy its eye appeal all year long. **Reprinted from the July 2009 issue of the St. Louis Hosta Society Newsletter**

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## 2010 cihs board!!

- President: conducts meetings-**Sue Eckhoff**
- Vice President: sets up meetings events and potluck-**Charlotte Woodhouse**
- Second Vice President: works with V. P. to set up meetings and events; sets up auction and banquet-**Shirley Metz**
- Third Vice President: sets up Solberg hosta order & bus trip-**Golda Ewalt**
- Recording Secretary: records and presents meeting minutes-**Chuck Crider**
- Corresponding Secretary: mails thank you notes, cards and other correspondence-**Donna Cothrell**
- Treasurer: maintains accounts, pays bills, writes checks-**Dan McConnell**
- Publicity Chair: notifies media of meetings and events, works with Publication Chair-**Phyllis Pollard, Fran Stroemer**
- Education Chair: promotes education at meetings-**Ella Maxwell, Bob Streitmatter**
- Ways and Means Chair: hosta of the month and fund raising-**Douglas Drenckpohl**
- Historian: keeps scrapbook and history of club-**Micheline Koch**
- Parliamentarian: advises board on parliamentary procedure-**Al Kuhlmann**
- Publication Chair: writes and assembles newsletter-**Bob Streitmatter**
- Librarian: maintains library-**Ella Maxwell**
- Membership Chair: maintains members list and accepts membership dues-**Kathy Allen**
- Hospitality: sets up refreshments and beverages-**Connie Zuercher, Bob Monier**



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Golda Ewalt  
309.360.3719  
[goldaandbob@hotmail.com](mailto:goldaandbob@hotmail.com)

Vice President  
Kathy Allen  
[jkallen9@comcast.net](mailto:jkallen9@comcast.net)

Second Vice President  
Shirley Metz  
309.263.7103  
[jametz@comcast.net](mailto:jametz@comcast.net)

Third Vice President  
Sue Eckhoff  
309-925-5267  
[gardener22@verizon.net](mailto:gardener22@verizon.net)

Recording Secretary  
Carol Morrissey  
309.263.0845  
[camorris99@hotmail.com](mailto:camorris99@hotmail.com)

Corresponding Secretary  
Donna Cothrell  
309.694.7648  
[dkcothrell@hotmail.com](mailto:dkcothrell@hotmail.com)

Treasurer  
Dan McConnell  
309.243.5925  
[drdtm@comcast.net](mailto:drdtm@comcast.net)

## to join:

Central Illinois Hosta Society  
\$10/year, form on back cover

Midwest Reg. Hosta Society  
\$20/2 years  
Send dues to:  
Barb Schroeder, Treasurer  
1819 Coventry Drive  
Champaign, IL 61822-5239

American Hosta Society  
\$30 individual, \$57/2 years  
\$34 family, \$62/2 years  
Send dues to:  
Sandie Markland  
AHS Membership Secretary  
Post Office Box 7539  
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948

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## welcome new members

Vickie Crosson  
Mary Beth Knott  
Linda Brown  
Christine Zinser  
Anne Routh

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## 2010 meetings & events

**Saturday January 23, 8-5 pm**  
**Winter Scientific Meeting**  
Schaumburg, IL, registration form at  
[www.midwesthostasociety.org](http://www.midwesthostasociety.org)

**Tuesday, March 16, 6:30 pm**  
**Hypertufa Troughs & TBA speaker**  
Freedom Hall  
349 W. Birchwood Street, Morton, IL

**Tuesday, April 20, 6:30 pm**  
**Potluck & TBA speaker**  
Freedom Hall  
349 W. Birchwood Street, Morton, IL

**Tuesday, May 18, 6:30 pm**  
Gloria Hicks' Garden  
1608 Robin Court, Morton, IL

**June 22-26, 2010 (New date!)**  
AHS National Convention  
"Stars of the North"  
Sheraton Hotel, Bloomington, MN

**July 8-10**  
**Midwest Regional Convention**  
Des Moines, IA

**2010 Bus Trip**  
TBA

**Tuesday, June 15, 6:30 pm**  
Bill and Toni Cottrell's Garden  
201 Daniel Pkwy, Washington, IL

**Tuesday, July 20, 6:30 pm**  
Connie Zuercher's Garden  
1448 W. Birchwood, Morton, IL

**Tuesday, August 17, 6:30 pm**  
**Hosta Auction**  
Illinois Central College

**Tuesday, Sept. 21, 6:00 pm (earlier time)**  
**Annual Banquet**  
Speaker: TBA  
Kickapoo Creek Winery

## The Light Shines Longer for Informed Buyers

When hosta fanciers consider a new purchase, perceived beauty is often the most significant driver. This beauty can be influenced by how a young plant looks in a pot, a picture, the plant description, its heritage, or possibly the favorable memory of having seen the plant in someone's garden.



When a pretty "face" catches our attention, we want the plant description to further convince us we have found a truly great plant that is worthy of the asking price. Unfortunately, even an ugly duckling is often depicted as a swan.

This is the point in time when education helps shoppers make informed decisions. Knowing a plant's heritage, the understanding of descriptors, and basic knowledge of what plant traits may become problematic in the garden, all help to minimize downstream dissatisfaction.

Like the bright lights of Vegas, the imaginary light normally shines brightly on each and every one of our well thought out selections, yet over time for some plants, the light eventually dims and sometimes burns out completely. In such cases, particular plants may fail to meet expectations for various reasons. Other times, it is just the inevitability of the collector falling prey to the never ending onslaught of newer hosta introductions. Hostas registered by well-known hybridizers or tissue culturists will favorably impact initial interest in a plant. The hype that occasionally surrounds some of the newer hostas can be too much to resist.

Several of the new registrations are tetraploid sports, most often developed via the tissue culture process, which are usually considered to be improvements over the parent plants. In addition hybridizing efforts continue to provide "new-look" hostas.

Even though hosta admirers are regularly enamored with newer introductions, the American Hosta Society's annual popularity poll continues to be dominated by relatively inexpensive and readily available hostas that have proven their garden worthiness throughout the hosta world. The light still shines brightly for these selections!

Until the initial price of newer cultivars drops and availability improves, such introductions will not populate enough gardens to prove or disprove their worthiness. Thusly, it takes a number of years, even for great newer introductions, to significantly impact popularity polls.

As you peruse through nursery isles, hard copy catalogs, Internet websites, etc., I caution you not to make purchase decisions solely on a pretty face. Armed with some basic

knowledge, your chances of purchasing plants that will light up your life for years to come is greatly enhanced.

By Ray Rodgers, CIHS

## thank you!!

Thank you for your thoughtfulness in making a contribution to Luthy Botanical Garden! Your contribution will be used to expand the hosta collection and further develop the Hosta Glade with signage, flowering shrubs and boxwood.

I speak for the entire staff when I express our sincere gratefulness for your generosity. It is a privilege to have organizations like Central Illinois Hosta Society within the community who are willing to support the Garden. We look forward to having your membership visit Luthy Botanical Garden!

## hosta sale!!!!

We still have hosta, remaining from the Solberg order and the Banquet. They are all for sale and \$10 each; those available are listed below. If interested, contact Bob Streitmatter at [goldaandbob@hotmail.com](mailto:goldaandbob@hotmail.com)

- *H.* 'Miss Linda Smith'
- *H.* 'Friends'
- *H.* 'Corkscrew'
- *H.* 'Ocean Isle'
- *H.* 'Frost Giant'
- *H.* 'Barbara May'

### Loose Parts



"Ooooooh! Pepper and pepper shakers!  
How thoughtful."

## Confusion surrounding Hardiness Zone Designations

A general warming trend over the past 20 years, the subsequent creation and updating of various “zone” maps, and plans for additional updates have possibly led to print inconsistencies and confusion among the general public.

The following information briefly details the zone map initiatives of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the American Horticultural Society (AHS), and The National Arbor Day Foundation (NADF).

The United States Department of Agriculture provides a Hardiness Zone Map, last updated in 1990. The map is based on the average annual minimum temperatures (the lowest temperatures recorded for each of the years 1974 through 1986). Nearly all American references books, nursery catalogs, and gardening magazines describe plants using USDA hardiness zones.

On the original 1960 USDA map, Central Illinois was a solid zone 5. Following a subdivision of this zone, Peoria basically now resides right on the border of zone 5a (-15° through -20°) and zone 5b (-10° through -15°). To view the current map and additional detail, see <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Hardzone/ushzmap.html>.

The United States Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) has undergone a research project to develop a new plant hardiness zone map. Completion date for this project is targeted for June 30, 2010. For an overview of this research project, see [http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/projects/projects.htm?ac\\_cn\\_no=411584](http://www.ars.usda.gov/research/projects/projects.htm?ac_cn_no=411584).

Heat also impacts plant growth, especially during drought conditions. The American Horticultural Society developed a plant heat-zone map, based on daily high temperatures recorded from 1974 through 1995, and the average number of days per year above 86° Fahrenheit for those years. According to this map, depending on exact location, Central Illinois is represented by zone 6 (45-60 days above 86°) and zone 7 (60-90 days above 86°).

There is an ever increasing trend for nursery stock to display both the USDA cold hardiness zone and AHS heat zone designations. In such cases, there will be two sets of numbers (4 numbers). The USDA cold hardiness zone range will be displayed first. A plant designated as 3-8, 8-3 means the plant should be expected to over-winter in zones 3 through 8 and be able to withstand summer heat in zones 8 through 3. In addition to nursery stock, the relatively new combined designations will start appearing in an ever increasing number of electronic and hard-copy publications.

In 2006 The National Arbor Day Foundation released their updated U.S. Hardiness Zone Map, also based on average annual low temperatures. Based on this map, Peoria, IL changed from zone 5 to zone 6 (0° through -10°), see <http://www.arborday.org/media/zones.cfm>.

Hopefully the above has helped clarify some of the zoning confusion. Keep in mind that print inconsistencies could still occur. When purchasing stock from local suppliers, this is not likely to be much of a concern. If considering ordering plants from other regions of the country, be sure you understand the source of any zone designations the prospective supplier(s) may reference. Cold and heat hardiness zone designations are just general guides. Many other factors affect a plant's survival. Tony Avent of Plant Delights Nursery provides additional history and his thoughts on what the maps don't tell you, in his December 30, 2007 article entitled “Plant Hardiness and Mapping Out A Strategy,” see <http://www.plantdelights.com/Tony/hardiness2.html>.

By Ray Rodgers, CIHS

## Soil Structure in the Culture of Hostas

We've all heard over and over again about the virtues of good garden soil. That elusive product called loam, a mixture of sand, silt and clay is described as a moisture retentive, well-drained medium. Sounds like a dichotomy to me. How can something be moisture retentive and well drained? Well, it can all be achieved with good soil structure. I'd buy a hosta, bring it home and dig a large hole, chop up the soil, shake most of the soil of the roots so I could spread them out, place the plant in the hole, and back fill with soil. At a later date if I wanted to divide the plant I'd dig it up, and it was nearly impossible to divide without chopping the plant up with a knife. The problem was the heavy clay soils native to northern Illinois. Without rehashing the story of soil structure which you can find in most gardening periodicals, I'd like to explain a discovery I made, through a meeting of the Northern Illinois Hosta Society.

At our spring 1994 meeting at DeVroomen Bulb Co. in Russell, Illinois, Andre Rutte gave a presentation on how hostas are grown in Holland. He emphasized how fast the plants grow because the soil is very sandy and has been amended with manure. The year before, I had also visited the garden of Van Wade in Bellville, Ohio. Van has one of the largest collections of hosta in the world, and has a H. 'Sum & Substance' nearly four feet high and ten feet across. Van presented his soil amending strategy at a previous Winter Scientific meeting, so I was aware of the importance of soil-structure. I was just beginning to propagate hosta varieties for sale and knew how slowly they increased in my garden due to the heavy clay soil. I

reasoned that if I could amend my soil with enough organic matter the hosta would increase in a similar fashion as they did in Holland. That same summer the N.I.H.S. visited the garden of Bob and Barb Carlson in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, where I noticed their use of mushroom compost for soil amendment. I got the address of their supplier of mushroom compost, which is a medium mushrooms are grown in, composed of sawdust, manure, and various plant nutrients. I decided to try to grow my hostas in soil amended with mushroom compost.

I ordered it, but decided after wheel barrowing a truckload of mushroom compost that was enough work, so I piled it on top of the native soil about a foot deep, and planted my hostas right in the compost. All seemed well until the plants started wilting. I dug up a few plants and the roots were all shriveled. Later I found out that salt is used to kill pathogens while growing mushrooms; and high concentrations were burning the roots of the hostas I planted in it. To leach the salts I watered the area heavily. This worked and all went very well. The hostas flourished. They put out long divisions, and most importantly the root mass was a tangle of fine roots. Dividing the plants was easier also. I could dig into the soil with my bare hands and the plants would come right up. I'd shake the soil off the roots to divide them and the divisions would fall apart. It was working better than expected.

During the growing season of 1995 I needed to expand my hosta propagation area, I didn't want to spend a lot of money on more mushroom compost. I reasoned that one of the main ingredients in mushroom compost is manure, and there are a number of stables in my area that board horses. I had a bad experience with horse manure in the past carrying weed seeds that germinated like, well, weeds! However some of the stables in the area don't pasture their horses; therefore the manure has fewer weed seeds. The stables have literally mountains of manure from stable bedding, which is comprised of mostly sawdust. Digging into the piles gets manure in different degrees of decomposition. I'm not looking for fresh, fertile, hot manure. I'm looking for a loose fertile growing medium, so digging into the mountains assures a well-composted product. For all you sitting there saying "Yuk! How disgusting digging into a smelly pile of manure," there is little odor in well-composted manure. If it did have a strong smell it would not be composted enough and could burn the plants. I'd fill five-gallon buckets, and large nursery containers with manure, truck them home and dump it about a foot deep where I wanted my new propagation beds. I plant the hostas and water well, stand back and watch them grow.

I can dig right into those beds with my hands to pull up a mass of roots. I planted some tissue culture liners of H. 'Blue Shadows'; we all know how slow this cultivar grows. All summer they sat there with only one leaf. In the fall I dug up one plant. The root mass was the size of a volleyball, with a tangle of fine roots! The plant had five dormant buds. I can hardly wait to see the results this year

of that rich growing medium on those tissue culture plants. I'm now sold on the concept of good soil structure.

Adding organic matter to the soil will greatly improve the growth of my hostas. Whether I go to the extent that Van Wade does to get his super hostas or I just dig in copious amounts of manure or compost, the results are worth it in vigorous growth and large, beautiful plants. I'm planning to dig up each of my 350 hostas and amend the soil with lots of manure, and from now on I'll prepare the garden beds before planting.

**By Tom Micheletti**, owner of The Hosta Patch in Deer Park, Illinois and current President of the American Hosta Society.

## Vole patrol



My big white tom cat, Beemer, was a rescue cat from a rather tough suburb of Chicago. He has repaid us many times over by bringing us little "presents" which he usually leaves right at the front door. That was my first introduction to voles.

The common North American Meadow Vole, sometimes known as a meadow mouse, can live in a network of above ground "runways" in grassy areas, along house foundations and stone walls as well as in underground burrows. The burrows are used to store food for the winter and to give birth. Voles are active during the day and all year long. In the winter, they will make tunnels in the snow.

The Meadow Vole resembles a mouse but has a stouter body, shorter legs, a shorter hairy tail and short ears which are hard to see through their grey brown to dark brown fur. They are about 4" long with a 2" tail and have a silvery grey underbelly. Voles have the shortest lifespan of any mammal, living less than one year, often only 3 to 6 months. Their main goal in life is to eat and reproduce. They will have 3 to 6 litters in their lifetime of about 4 to 7 young and are monogamous.

Their diet consists of grasses, sedges, seeds, conifer needles, bark and the roots of HOSTAS! A nice warm burrow under a large clump of hosta will set up a vole family for the winter months. Tucked away from predators, they can produce a couple of litters before spring.

Damage to hostas may not be evident until spring. Since the voles eat the roots, where there was once a big, beautiful plant will be a big, bare spot. It may be worthwhile to dig in the bare spots to see if you find a tunnel or burrow and not just assume you lost a hosta for

another reason. While you may not find the vole, since the food trough was emptied, you will know you have a problem and can begin to work on the little rodents. If you find tunnels running towards a hosta, dig it up and fill in the burrow before replanting to keep the roots from being exposed to big air pockets and drying out. Then you can figure out which method of control is best for you.

It may be hard to prevent voles from moving in, since we set out the HOSTA BUFFET OPEN sign, but there are a few things we can do. Keep the grass mowed. Roll the lawn to collapse visible tunneling. Clean up weedy debris and brush from around the foundation of the house. Remove mulch from the hosta beds or keep it to 1" making it hard to tunnel under. Replace wood mulch with pea gravel or crushed stone-they won't tunnel through it. They don't even like to dig in gravel, so when planting hostas, first throw a shovel full of sharp gravel into the hole. Tilling the vegetable garden in the fall removes a food source and will also collapse tunnels. Pull mulch back about a foot from the base of trees.

Planting your hostas in containers is one method of vole control. Or, place your hosta in a basket of ¼" hardware cloth before planting in the ground to keep the little devils away from the roots.

To find the entrance to a burrow, look for a hole about 1" to 2" across which may have a roadway eaten in the grass leading to it. You can trap a vole like a mouse. Use the same type of snap mouse trap baited with peanut butter. Place it close to the hole and cover it with a bucket or basket to keep it dark. Wait a couple of days before checking it. Then go daily to empty and keep baited. Continue baiting until a week goes by without capturing anything. This should work for smaller infestations.

For larger infestations, rodenticides (poison mouse bait purchased over the counter) can be placed in the burrow entrance. Great care must always be used when handling any poison. Place it down in the hole but leave the hole open for about a week so they will take the bait into the burrow. After that, fill in the holes. If the poison has done its job, the hole will stay closed. If the hole reappears, put in more bait.

There are some commercial products available that are not poisonous and can be used to repel voles. A product called 'WHOLE CONTROL' uses a hose end sprayer and leaves a residual bad taste in the soil that remains effective for 3 months. It is also reported to repel armadillos, in case that is also a problem for you.

'VOLE BLOCK' is a non-toxic soil additive of coarse particles of expanded natural slate and is applied as a physical barrier in the soil surrounding the root system and as mulch around the plant.

'LIQUID FENCE MOLE & VOLE REPELLENT' is another hose end sprayer type that is formulated to coat earthworms and roots making them unpalatable but does not harm either. Two applications may be needed.

'REPELLEX VOLE & GOPHER REPELLENT' takes castor oil and emulsifying agents and then adds paprika resins for an extra tasty kick. It is also sprayed.

And lastly, 'PESTACATOR', which is a solar powered ground rodent repeller. It emits high tech sonic sounds in complex variable frequencies that are directed by a tube to penetrate the tunnel systems. It is supposed to impact the rodent's nervous system and they cannot adapt and move on. Must be like those cars you pull up next to at the stoplight with the giant speakers blasting that cause your car windows to rattle. That impacts my nervous system. The 'Pestacator' will cover a 100' diameter and the end must be inserted into a tunnel or burrow.

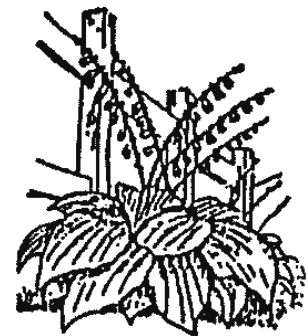
Besides being good exercise for my cat and food for a few carnivores like owls and snakes, is there any reason not to exterminate voles from the face of the earth? Would you believe they have the potential to give us information on human genetics and the mysteries of evolution? J. Andrew DeWoody, associate professor of genetics in the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources at Purdue University, believes that voles will do just that.

It appears that voles are evolving at 60 to 100 times faster than the average vertebrate in creating new species. They are studying 60 species in the genus vole. Oddly, voles vary in chromosomes from 17 to 64. Usually the chromosomes numbers in species are the same. And, males and females in the same species may have different numbers of chromosomes. All voles look very similar and may be completely indistinguishable. But, they know each other, and there is no evidence of their mating outside of their species. Co-authoring this research is former graduate student Deb Triant. They are focusing on the vole's mitochondrial DNA inserting itself within the DNA in the cell nucleus. For us, this could impact the gene delivery mechanisms used in gene therapy. Who would have thought a vole could do that.

Now, if only we could get the Agricultural Department at Purdue to develop a hosta with castor oil scented roots and leaves that tasted like hot peppers. It may not save the world, but they would sell a million of them.

**By Mary Bardens**

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