



April, 2011

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Harshbarger Spring Meeting

Tuesday, April 19

6:30 social hour

7:00 meeting begins

Location: Coralville Public Library

Speaker: HHS member Becki Lynch on "Ornamental Grasses in the hosta garden." Should be fun!

Refreshments: by Mary and Sue (before the meeting)

Directions to Coralville Public Library, 1401 5th Street, Coralville

From the Coralville Strip, (aka 2nd Street or hiway 6), turn north onto 12th Avenue. Drive about 1.5 blocks, follow signs to library parking. Parking down one floor will allow direct access to the meeting rooms in the library's basement.

Meeting Topics

- Bus Tour to Pella - June 4th?
- Club hosta garden tours and hosta auction - June 25th?

Club Dues

Dues for 2011 are due now, \$10/year. You may pay at the meeting or send a check to Lois Cahill. Checks should be made out to Harshbarger Hosta Society.

Minutes from the fall meeting

Notes were taken by Lori Hughes in the absence of Sharon Weiss. The meeting took place in the Cedar Rapids Library at Westdale Mall. A program was presented by Gary Wittenbaugh on dwarf conifers.

The meeting was called to order by president, Judi Pohorsky. A get well card was passed for Sharon Weiss.

Treasurer's report: Lois Cahill reported that the club now has 58 members. Our hosta auction in June, 2010, brought in \$742. The balance in our account is \$3922.83.

Old business: the lack of a viable website for the club was discussed as was the low volunteer rate for various committees.

New business: the shade structure at Noelridge Park in Cedar Rapids is complete. Judi read a note from Jim Venemann thanking the hosta society for the structure and all the plants. Gordon Emmons thanked all who assisted in its construction and talked about the remaining two structures to be built. The club is applying for four grants to build these, and will work on designs when the money becomes available.

Judi brought up the possibility of Harshbarger hosting a Midwest Hosta Society convention in 2012. The pros and cons were discussed. The auction last summer at Jay and Nancy McWherter's was a great success. Don Zeller was our auctioneer and made the day very memorable. Judi thanked Mary Lowder for her work on the club newsletters.

Upcoming hosta events were discussed.

Jeanie Geers mentioned her recent problems with voles and gave the

members ideas on how to rid hosta gardens of these pests.

Colette Janisch had a garden sale fundraiser with 10% going to "Friends of Noelridge" for their structures. They raised about \$300. Thanks go to Colette and all those that participated.

Door Prizes:

- H. 'Rick Rack' – from Colette Janisch
- H. 'Satisfaction' & a H. 'Victory' seedling – from Jay and Nancy McWherter
- 3 clematis – from Rick and Teresa Innis
- H. 'Grand Slam' – from Jeanie and Jerry Geers
- 3 hosta note card packets – from Carol Holmes
- 2 H. 'Alligator Shoes', 3 H. 'Crusader', 1 'Hosta Bingo' – from Shirley Steele.

VOLE PATROL

By Mary Bardens

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.



Beemer Bardens on Vole Patrol

Editor's note: Jeanie Geers, Dry Creek Hostas, recommends the use of full sized, snap style rat traps to control voles. "Victor" is a common brand.

Upcoming Hosta Events

Some dates are tentative – confirm before attending!

- April 19 - Harshbarger Hosta Society's Spring meeting and program (see page 1)
- May 7 – Project Green plant sale, Carver Arena, Iowa City
- June 4 – Harshbarger Bus Trip to Pella , IA
- June 5 – Dubuque Hosta Festival
- June 25 – Harshbarger Garden Tours
- July 7-10 Midwest Hosta Convention, Madison, WI

