



Tony Glover
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Hosta Plants

Question: I recently noticed several of my hosta plants have been eaten. Do you know who the culprit might be?

Answer: There are several possible critters who could be the culprits. I will mention a few from most to least likely but this is somewhat dependent on where you live and what surrounds the hosta beds.

Mice and voles are major pests of hostas. They will often move in during the winter months and hang around as long as plenty of food is available. Voles are often confused with moles because of the spelling and pronunciation but they are not the same critter. I recently got a call asking about a third critter the caller called a smole. I broke my own rule of never laughing at a question until after I hang up the phone. After my inappropriate display of mirth I decided I better google the word smoles just to be sure no such animal existed. Happily, I found out my initial response was correct but I did learn a little about “Synchronous Modeling Language for Embedded Systems (SMOLES),” but I digress.

The only practical suggestion I have heard on protecting hostas against voles and mice is to encircle the crown of plants in mesh hardware cloth or wire baskets with 3/8” or less squares. Removing mulch from around the base of plants may help some just by exposing the critters to better view for predators like cats or birds of prey.

If the plants appear grazed upon with no tunneling around them it could be deer or even rabbits. Short of putting the hostas in a cage I know of no way to eliminate deer or rabbit damage. There are many repellants on the market that have varying degrees of effectiveness but they are usually too expensive to be practical as a long term solution.

Snails and slugs can cause considerable damage that is characterized by holes in the leaves rather than entire plants gone AWOL (away without leaves). If this is your problem you may consider removing the mulch from around the base of plants and/or using a slug and snail bait. There are many bait products available but I am not sure the best hours for catching the little buggers or what “test” line you need to reel in a big slug.

On a more serious note I would like to tell you about an upcoming opportunity to learn more about growing and caring for this wonderful and diverse group of plants. The Alabama Hosta Society and the Dixie Region of the American Hosta Society

(www.hosta.org) will host an event at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens on June 1st and 2nd. Knowledgeable speakers and special hosta vendors will be present to share knowledge and introduce you to new varieties as well as old favorites. For more details about this event you may contact the president of the Alabama Hosta Society, Norma Chandler at 205-854-1180 or email her at nfchandler@earthlink.net.

For more about this topic please contact Tony Glover, Regional Extension Agent-Home Horticulture, Home Gardens and Home Pest Management at the St. Clair County Extension Office at (205) 338-9416 or email gloveta@auburn.edu.

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