

Protecting Your Garden from Exposure to HVX

At this time, we need to educate the buying public and hosta society members that if they are not buying their hosta from reputable sources, that is, *those who buy from tissue culture labs in the US and guarantee their plants to be disease free*, they may be exposing themselves to infection. Most US tissue culture labs are now indexing for HVX. The only thing that we as gardeners can do at this time is report the suspected offending plant and vendor to the local DNR. For example, the Indiana DNR has taken a very active role in educating themselves to HVX. Some states' DNR are now purchasing the new test methods available and training for field use. If your local DNR is unfamiliar with the new tests, give them this information: www.agdia.com.

The actions taken by the USDA have slowed the import of infected plants; however this primarily impacts the box stores. If you have recently visited your local box store, you may have noticed fewer hostas for sales in these stores. The USDA can only stop major importers. This does not stop smaller independent nurseries from purchasing plants from tier 2 importers. The reason some nurseries continue to purchase tier 2 imported plants is price. You can buy an imported Striptease, Sum and Substance, or Pandora's Box, for example, for about \$1.25 for a large bare root plant. It only takes a few months for a plant to be out of TC into a field grown situation and available in the US for purchase. It is always a good idea to ask where your local nursery buys their plants if you wish to avoid the possibility of exposure to HVX. Do not accept the answer that they "do not know," as every retail seller knows exactly where their plants come from.

The purpose of the American Hosta Society HVX project is two fold; one, to find out more about transmission methods of Hosta Virus X. Once that is determined; two, go to the United States Department of Agriculture who controls the importation of plants and use the information to guide them through the detection process. Right now, it is presumed that the most common method of transmission is by the machines used to harvest the plants from the field. Current research proves that it takes a wound to wound exposure to infect a plant thus indicating why mechanical harvesting may be perfect for spreading infection. Viruses can not live without a live cell to invade and the virus does not stay viable outside the cell for long. One important item of the study is to have empirical proof that improper cleaning of the mechanical devices is the method of transmission. Currently the most common method of cleaning mechanical harvesters is bleach. This is ineffective for controlling virus since bleach loses its potency shortly after exposure to air. The AHS can not approach the USDA on what we may think; we must have documentation that we can recreate in a lab, many times. If you do not have empirical proof, you have liability. At this time the USDA and several states Departments of Natural Resources are cooperating fully with the AHS. At the completion of the project, the AHS will publish a document about our funded research and distributing it not just to hosta societies, but to the above mentioned agencies and to universities with agriculture departments. These groups have been very supportive in their support of the AHS efforts.

Fortunately, HVX does not spread easily in the garden. It is however a disfiguring disease that can be easily controlled by disposing of the infected plant. Education is the key to preventing further spread of this disease and that is what the AHS is trying to do by underwriting the study and making the information available once it has been completed.