

A New Year, A New Challenge, Award-Winning Hosta and Upcoming Events



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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Do they Really Work?

Perennial PULSE

News and commentary on the global perennial plant market



What's Happening Here?

Can you believe January is nearly over? It's hard to think the year is already nearly 1/12th or 8.333% over. Before too much time passes, I think we should have the first diagnostic challenge of the year. I promise to keep this one simple.

Before we start, please allow me to explain how this game works. From time to time, I begin the newsletter with a challenge to test your diagnostic skills. I'll share a picture and possibly a clue or two to help you out. It could be an insect, disease, virus or some other problem I've come across. Then I ask you to solve the challenge. It's pretty straightforward and I've stocked up on lots of virtual gold stars to award all the correct answers I receive with each challenge. Are you ready? Here's the first challenge of the year.





Here is a rather large planting of *Dicentra spectabilis* being produced in an outside production bed. It was taken in the early spring a few years ago. As you can see, many of them are growing just fine while a large group of them are not. Did these empty pots even get planted? What would cause such a large area to not emerge?

As I said above, this should be an easy one, but you never know. Let's find out. It's time for me to ask, "What's happening here?"



Award-Winning Hosta

I featured several perennials of the year in the last newsletter. There's always a lot of great plants that will be widely promoted by various associations and companies. I thought of one more I should mention. It's the American Hosta Growers Association's Hosta of the Year.



The honor of the 2023 Hosta of the Year goes to Hosta Neptune. Neptune is a unique blue hosta with narrow wedge-shaped glaucous blue leaves. It holds its color very well. The leaves turn more blue-green as the season progresses and create a beautiful cascading form. Its foliage grows 24-in. high by 47-in. across. Hardy to Zone 3.

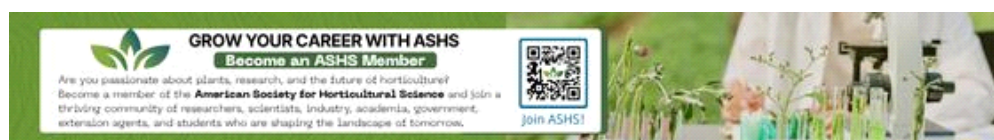


February Events

Here's several of the trade events going next month. Click on the event name to get more information.

January 30 – February 1	Indiana Green Expo Indianapolis, Indiana
January 31 – February 1	Total Pro Expo & Conference Edison, New Jersey
February 1-3	iLandscape Schaumburg, Illinois
February 2-3	Northeast Texas Greenhouse Conference & Expo Arlington, Texas

February 9-10	Jacksonville Landscape Show Jacksonville, Florida
February 9	Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show San Mateo, California
February 15-19	Northwest Flower & Garden Festival Seattle, Washington
February 18	Perennial Plant Association Mid-Atlantic Regional Symposium Linthicum Heights, Maryland
February 23-26	Connecticut Flower & Garden Show Hartford, Connecticut
February 23	Proven Winners Landscape Roadshow Burlington, Kentucky



Upcoming Webinars

You don't necessarily have to travel to catch a great presentation or two. Here's some of the great upcoming webinars.

Do or Dianthus: How to Pick the Right Variety and Schedule Your Best Dianthus Crop

Join Dianthus expert Gary Vollmer from Selecta One as he walks you through the broad variety of genetics available and gives guidance for successful and profitable programs.

Date: Wednesday, February 1, 2023

Time: 1:00 PM Eastern/12:00 PM Central

How: Click [HERE](#) to register for this FREE webinar.

Here's a glimpse of some of the topics Gary will be covering:

- The various classes and varieties of dianthus and how they can be used—as indoor holiday pot carnations, premium annuals or traditional perennials.
- Choosing varieties based on growing conditions, container sizes, region and desired timing.
- Opportunities for dianthus in the marketplace.

Spoiler Alert—this is actually the first of a two-part series. The second part will be announced soon.

Gearing Up for Spring: Nursery

AmericanHort is hosting a Back 2 Basics webinar covering the best management practice for nursery operations.

Date: Tuesday, February 7, 2023

Time: 2:00 PM – 3:30 PM Eastern Time

How: Click [HERE](#) to learn more.

Attendees will hear best management practices for managing pests, diseases, irrigation and more from Dr. Margery Daughtrey (Cornell University), Heather Kase (BioBee USA and Dr. Gerardo Spinelli (University of California Cooperative Extension-San Diego). This sounds like a great topic and line up of speakers to help you get a great start with the upcoming season.

Overwintering Perennials & Perennial Plant of the Year Production Tips

The Perennial Plant Association is hosting two excellent sessions at its upcoming Virtual Edition Grower Education event.

Date: Wednesday, February 8, 2023

Time: 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM Eastern Time

How: Click [HERE](#) to learn more.



“Perennial Production Pros Talk Overwintering” is the first topic and features a panel of industry experts including Jan Gulley (Gulley Greenhouse & Garden Center—Fort Collins, Colorado), Lisa Kowalyszyn (Prides Corner Farms—Lebanon, Connecticut) and Bryan Benner (Quality Greenhouses & Perennial Farm—Dillsburg, Pennsylvania). Join them as they share their overwintering challenges and strategies.



2023 PPOY Rudbeckia American Gold Rush

Paul Westervelt (Saunders Brothers, Inc.—Piney River, Virginia) will be presenting “Successfully Growing Perennial Plant of the Year Winners” in the second session. He’ll not only entertain you

with his humor and enthusiasm, he'll be sharing tons of production tips for producing many of the Perennial Plant of the Year winners.

Scheduling & PGRs

The PPA is hosting a second Virtual Edition Grower Education event in February.

Date: Tuesday, February 21, 2023

Time: 11:00 AM – 1:30 PM Eastern Time

How: Click [HERE](#) to learn more.

In the first session, Caitlin Splawski (Walters Gardens—Zeeland, Michigan) will be presenting “Scheduling Herbaceous Perennials for Season-Long Interest.” She’ll be discussing various tools to adjust crop times, increase shelf life and ensure great flowering perennials from spring to fall.

The second session, “Obtaining Consistent Results with Plant Growth Regulators” will be given by yours truly. I’ll be sharing many tips on how to use plant growth regulators successfully on both plugs/liners and finished containers. I look forward to seeing you there next month.

Top New Perennials for 2023

Join Walters Gardens Regional Product Manager Laura Robles as she presents 15 of the most popular new perennials for the 2023 retail season and another 15 more being introduced for 2024.

Date: Thursday, March 2, 2023

Time: 1:00 PM Eastern/12:00 PM Central

How: Click [HERE](#) to register for this FREE webinar.

I invite you to join Laura as she shares these new perennials from Proven Winners and Walters Gardens.

The Answer Is...



At the top of the newsletter, I shared the image above and asked if you could determine what was causing the dicentra to look this way. Growing plants outside can be a challenge and overwintering them even more so. There it is, the best clue so far. These dicentra were planted the previous year and overwintered outside.

Before I explain more, if you guessed overwintering or cold damage, you nailed it and earned one of the virtual gold stars I promised. Okay, now that you know the answer, it may not be clear how this cold injury occurred. What you can't see in this image is the protective blankets that once covered the dicentra have been removed. At some point during the winter, a large section of the blanket blew off the crop leaving it unprotected and susceptible to cold. You can clearly see the areas where the blankets blew off.

Do They Really Work?

I'm frequently asked if protective blankets really protect plants from cold and my simple answer is "absolutely." They say an image is worth a thousand words, but I'm not going to use quite that many. As you can see in the image in the previous article, there were thousands of plants lost in the areas where the wind removed the coverings. I've seen this throughout the country, both in northern and southern locations.



Here is another example of cold injury causing crop losses due to a hole in the protective blanket.

Here are a few facts and pointers about using protective blankets.

- A simple thermal blanket covering dormant plants can result in temperatures beneath the cloth 8–10° F (4–6° C) warmer than the air above the thermal blanket.
- Blankets not only protect plants during the coldest periods of the weather, but they are also very effective at protecting plants as they become deacclimated to cold with increasing or fluctuating temperatures in the late winter or early spring.
- Be sure to properly anchor the blankets to prevent the wind from blowing them off the plants. Someone should check the covered beds daily to fix any blankets that have become displaced by the wind.
- Evergreen varieties should only be covered (with any material) during the coldest periods during the winter months. Removing the covers whenever the temperatures warm up (consistently above 40° F during the day and above freezing at night) will decrease optimum conditions for disease development. The coverings can remain longer on crops such as daylilies that go completely dormant during the winter months.
- It is best to pull the coverings off in such a manner that they can be pulled back over the plants to provide frost protection when freezing temperatures return. In a typical spring, it is often necessary to recover and remove the coverings several times before the temperatures remain warm enough to remove the coverings permanently. Once a plant becomes deacclimated and begins to actively grow, it is very susceptible to freeze events. If the temperatures are expected to fall near or below freezing, frost blankets should be reapplied.
- Blankets are also beneficial when used inside structures. Using blankets inside unheated structures is a great insurance policy and provides additional protection from cold.

Thanks for reading this edition of *Perennial Pulse*. My email is paul@opelgrowers.com if you have any comments, article suggestions or if you'd just like to say hello.

Stay warm next week!



Paul Pilon

Editor-at-Large—*Perennial Pulse*

Director of Growing—Opel Growers

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