

## Zen, Beatles, and the Fall Plant Sale

By Lee Pacatte, President

I have always had somewhat of a Zen attitude about the comings and goings of plants in my gardens. I try not to worry too much about things I can't change or can't control. Particularly, the role that nature plays. And this summer, nature has played a particularly sizzling part.

The garden is less full of life and more full of life lessons, as well as botanical ones. Always. Using the botanical lessons that I learn daily through Bastrop County Master Gardeners; I try to grow the right plant in the right place at the right time and give it all the advantages that I can muster. This certainly lessens my plant losses. But still, there is only so much a mere gardener can do in the middle of central Texas' longest continuous stretch of 100° heat in 125 years (per KXAN Weather).

As Master Gardeners, conserving our water resources in our gardening practices is nothing new. We all learned about Earth-Kind Landscaping and have implemented what we could. Time to visit or revisit those lessons. And although the increased costs of water bills and landscape plant replacements is motivating to do more, the loss of some of my precious plant friends and the enjoyment they have given me, is more than a financial loss, it is a personal one. But many will survive, despite nature's over-the-top temperatures this summer.

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## Ledebouria petiolata: Ideal Hosta Replacement

By Howard Nemerov



*Hosta undulata Mediovarigata'*  
 courtesy of Easy to Grow Bulbs

Many gardeners ask about growing Hostas, especially those moving here from cooler climates. They are at best poorly suited to Central Texas. Fortunately, there's a viable candidate to fill the same landscaping niche beneath shade trees.

In more hospitable climates, Hostas comprise "about 70 species of shade-loving, rhizomatous, clump-forming, herbaceous perennials which are native to open woodlands, woodland margins and glades in Japan, Korea, China and eastern Russia."<sup>1</sup> Iowa State University Extension calls

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Ob-la-di. Ob-la-da. Life goes on!

And I intend to reward the survivors (and myself) with some new plant friends come October 7<sup>th</sup>. Fall Plant Sale planning and growing is well underway. Please plan to help or attend if you can.

Cultivating the good,

Lee (the prez)



*(Ledebouria petiolata: Ideal Hosta Replacement, continued from page 1)*

Hostas the “quintessential shade plant.”<sup>2</sup> This tells us all we need to know here in Texas, where many plants considered “full sun” do well beneath high tree shade or direct morning sun only: If it likes shade in Iowa, where will it grow here?

Hostas also attract slugs and snails; in my garden, *Ledebouria petiolata* has not suffering predation from these mollusks.

*Ledebouria petiolata* (née *Drimiopsis maculata*, commonly called African False Hosta or Little White Soldiers) provides an excellent Hosta replacement.<sup>3</sup> Attesting to its shade tolerance, in Nature this plant resides “on forest floors and shaded stream banks in eastern southern Africa.” Literature states these

bulbs like “well drained but organic rich medium” and prefer being kept moist “during the summer growing season.”<sup>4</sup> I have found it to perform well when planted in mulched soil that has been improved with organic matter, and is drought tolerant once established. When treated as xeric, it goes dormant in summer but revives with fall rains and cooler temperatures. It then returns reliably in spring from bulbs, making it a root-hardy perennial here.

Spring is when *Ledebouria petiolata* puts on its best performance. New leaves exhibit purplish spots, and flower spikes produce white florets that offer early season nectar for pollinators. Fertilized flowers produce small, black seeds that self-sow, or you can harvest and start them to share or for further landscaping projects.

Bulbs offset freely. My original 4-inch quart pot bulged with about a dozen bulbs large enough to separate. Two years later, these small plants spread to fill a 6-foot bed along the driveway beneath Pecan tree shade. Offsets and seedlings provide enough new plants to offer at our plant sales.

*Ledebouria petiolata* also produces spikes of small white flowers in spring, providing an early season nectar source for pollinators.

*Ledebouria petiolata* is everything Hostas are up north: tough; easy to grow; shade tolerant; with the added benefit of slug and snail resistance. They are an excellent alternative in Central Texas, where Hostas fear to tread.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “*Hosta undulata* ‘*Erromena*.’” Missouri Botanical Garden. Accessed August 10, 2023. <https://www.missouribotanicalgarden.org/PlantFinder/PlantFinderDetails.aspx?taxonid=248957>

<sup>2</sup> “*Hosta* (*Hosta* sp.)” Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, December 2021. Accessed August 7, 2023. <https://hortnews.extension.iastate.edu/hosta-hosta-sp>

<sup>3</sup> Manning, J.C., Goldblatt, P., and Fay, M.F. “*Ledebouria petiolata*”. Texas A&M Horticulture. Accessed August 7, 2023. <https://aggie-hort.tamu.edu/syllabi/308/Lists/Fourth%20Edition/Ledebouriapetiolata.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> “*Ledebouria*.” Pacific Bulb Society, June 18, 2019. Accessed August 7, 2023. <https://www.pacificbulbsociety.org/pbswiki/index.php/Drimiopsis#maculata>



# ***Nemophila phacelioides*: Early-Season Pollinators Will Thank You**

By Howard Nemerov



*Pollinator’s eye view of Nemophila phacelioides colony beneath Crape Myrtles.*

*Nemophila phacelioides*, commonly called Texas Baby Blue Eyes, offers many benefits to gardeners and pollinators alike: Bastrop County native adapted to local conditions; part-shade preference; early-season nectar; self-seeding, low-maintenance annual; and living mulch.

Most native wildflowers prefer full sun. After removing a large plant from the front xeriscape, an established *Nemophila phacelioides* colony now looks like it’s dying back because I removed its shade. Three years ago, I dug and planted 12 seedlings along the backyard’s west fence, where an Elm tree and Crape Myrtles provide afternoon shade. Those 12 plants have now become a colony over 20 feet long, highlighting this plant’s preference for occupying woodland edges and understory environments shielding them from hot

sun.

In March, most warm-season flowers are getting established, not flowering. *Nemophila phacelioides* fills a need for hungry pollinators coming out of winter dormancy. Honey bees love the nectar, but beneficial insects and other small native bees frequent the flowers, ensuring a season-long parade of native pollinators as Zinnias, Marigolds, and native flowers mature.

While a few grasses pushed through the dense growth, *Nemophila phacelioides* nevertheless offers excellent weed suppression while feeding pollinators. By summer, it dies back, providing organic mulch that breaks down to feed next year’s colony. I didn’t have success harvesting seeds until I used Organza bags. Otherwise, by the



*Hungry bee taking header trying to get some nectar.*

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Howard Nemerov

*Furrow Bee (Halictid tribe) gathering pollen and nectar for larvae.*

time I found ripened pods the seeds had dispersed. If happy where you planted it, leave it alone and it will perform for you—and local pollinators—each spring.

## Identification

Being a prolific seed producer, it's easy to turn a few plants into a colony within three years. The picture below (left) shows what the cotyledons look like after emergence.

Annual weeds also begin emerging at the same time, so it's important to identify which seedlings you want to keep. Notice the density of the planting: *Nemophila phacelioides* naturally crowds out competition.



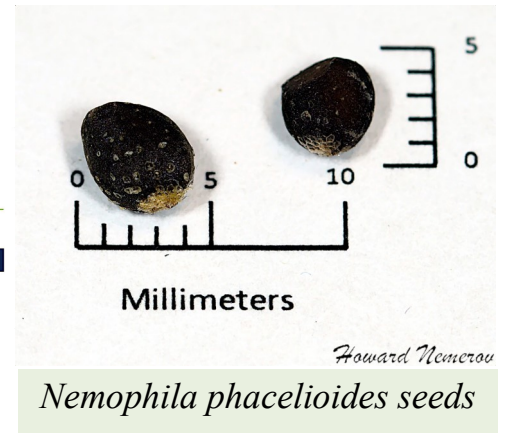
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*Green Metallic Sweat Bee (Augochloropsis metallica)*



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*Cotyledons of newly-emerged seedlings, early November.*



Howard Nemerov

*Nemophila phacelioides seeds*

## Selected References

- “*Nemophila phacelioides*.” Plant Database, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. [https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=NEPH](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=NEPH)
- Katie Buckley, Catherine Zettel Nalen, and Jamie D. Ellis. “Sweat Bees, Halictid Bees, Halictidae (Insecta: Hymenoptera: Halictidae).” IFAS Extension, University of Florida. <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdf%5CIN%5CIN89700.pdf>
- “*Nemophila phacelioides*.” USDA Plant Database. <https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/home/plantProfile?symbol=NEPH>
- “Genus *Halictus* - Furrow Bees.” Bugguide, Iowa State University Department of Entomology. <https://bugguide.net/node/view/12488>
- Nemerov, Howard. “Seed Saving with Organza Bags.” What’s Growing On? June 2023, pages 4–7. <https://txmg.org/bastropcounty/files/2023/06/06-Jun.pdf>

## Volunteering

Master Gardeners volunteer in the community to teach others about horticulture. We follow the research-based recommendations of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. Members who complete 50 hours of volunteer service in the year after training earn the designation “Texas Master Gardener.” We use our title only when engaged in Texas A&M AgriLife Extension activities.