

# MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS

Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society



## *In this issue of Hosta Happenings*

*By Michael Greanya*

*Hosta Hillside Chair*

I hope everyone is doing well, staying safe, and that we will soon begin to climb our way out of the pandemic everyone has endured for almost a year. As of this writing, there is uncertainty as to when it will be safe for us to interact, but it seems clear that this will not happen before spring. Because of this, it is unlikely that we will be able to gather at Hosta Hillside for our annual spring get together that generally takes place in late May. The MHS Board will continue to monitor facts as they are made available and, should we be given the green light from Michigan State University/Hidden Lake Gardens, we will send an email blast to the membership and plan for our special day together. In the meantime, I hope you will find this newsletter entertaining and informative and it gives you something to

look forward to as we slowly get closer to the time when we can get back to our gardens as they unfold and display their beauty.

While we are fortunate to have hybridizers from Michigan actively involved in propagation of hostas like Hans Hansen, Don Rawson, Noah Schwartz, and Terry Gage — to name a few — we also have many well-known pioneers from Michigan who advanced the evolution of hosta cultivars. All of these hybridizers have extensive experience growing hostas from seed, as well as with genetics and crosses that go far beyond the basic understanding of how to get seed to germinate and grow these babies.

I asked a friend and fellow hostaphile to write an article about the process of growing hosta from seed, and I am so very pleased that she accepted my invitation. She has a lot of experience growing hosta from seed, and she has an incredible eye for showing the process with photos.

## Hosta History

In 1966, the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum became the International Registration Authority for Hosta.



In 1969, the American Hosta Society was founded by Alex Summers, its first president. Today the Society has several thousand members in States from coast to coast and various countries from around the world.



In 1985, Barry Yinger, with the U.S. National Arboretum, lead an expedition to Korea, bringing back two species, H. 'yingeri' and H. 'jonesii'.



In 1987, Brian Matthew placed Hosta in a family of its own, Hostaceae. Today, the Hosta family includes about 40 species, four coming from China and the rest from Korea and Japan.

Courtesy of Don Rawson from Hosta, The Flowering Foliage Plant (Portland, OR: Timber Press, Inc., 1990), Chapter 1, "The Historical Perspective."

Kathie Sisson from Avon, Connecticut is the former president of Tri-State Hosta Society, former AHS Training Chair, and an admitted hosta fanatic and hybridizer who loves sharing her enthusiasm through photography and by giving hosta presentations to garden clubs and plant societies. Thank you, Kathie!! If you haven't already, I hope you will give seed starting a try. It really is a lot of fun.

Don Rawson is back after his car accident and his recovery continues. We are grateful for Don's regular contributions and give thanks to Pam Rawson for filling in for Don with her article that appeared in our last newsletter. Don doesn't just answer the call for action, he is eager to dive into new articles so he can share his ideas and experiences. Don will continue his current series in this newsletter with 3 new suggestions on how to grow homogenous hostas.

I am also excited to tell you that Don will begin a new series he calls 'Oh Deer!' where various methods of deterring deer from your gardens are discussed. You will find Method #1 in this newsletter.

We hope you enjoy this issue of Hosta Happenings!

## *Update on the 2021 AHS National Convention*

*By Don Rawson and Ed Steinbrecher,  
2021 AHS National Convention Co-chairs*

As you probably know, the 2021 National Convention of The American Hosta Society is slated to be held in West Michigan this summer. If you are like me, you have been looking forward to this event with great anticipation, particularly since last year's convention was canceled due to the pandemic. We are itching to meet with our hosta friends again and tour some of the best gardens around!

However, in light of the pandemic, we have had to re-evaluate our plans to hold an in-person event at the Radisson in Kalamazoo. A national convention such as ours involves a great percentage of people in the high-risk category. In addition, our convention draws people from not only around the country, but internationally as well — a recipe for potential disaster!

We know that to cancel the convention altogether would be a huge disappointment to you, to our convention committee, and to the entire membership of The American Hosta Society. Therefore, we are working with the Board

of The American Hosta Society to consider all of our options. We will keep you informed of the latest developments as soon as we possibly can. Meanwhile, we encourage you to take every precaution possible to stay healthy, and we appreciate your support as we move forward during these trying times.



Photo by Michael Greanya



# Hosta Seed Starting 101

By Kathie Sisson of Avon, Connecticut

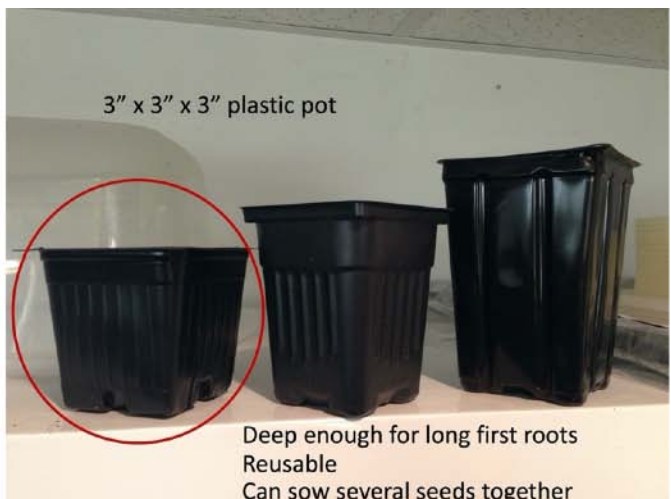
**Winter time** for hosta fanatics can be a tough time of year. The gardens are dormant, the days are shorter, and the air is often so frigid that we find ourselves indoors more than out. One great way to beat the 'winter doldrums' is to find alternative hosta activities, like perusing plant catalogs and dreaming of future garden designs or projects. A favorite winter hosta activity for me is growing hosta babies from seed. This is much easier than some may think and does not require any high tech equipment. There is also no 'right' way or 'wrong' way, only 'your' way. Let's begin the journey...



Soil-less mix begins with store bought seed starter, add perlite and vermiculite



**Important step:** Kill off insect eggs



Basic items you will need include seed, a good soil-less mix, pots or containers, water and light. I like to use seed from an interesting source, like a known cross between two hostas with pleasing characteristics, as this will lead to more interesting seedlings. Many seedlings will be plain and green, but the chance of getting something fun and unique increases when you begin with seed from an exciting gene pool.



Start by 'sterilizing' your mix by moistening with water and 'cooking' in a microwave or by pouring boiling water over the mix, covering to seal in the steam, and letting it steep until cool. This will cut down on potential insect problems. Next, fill your containers without packing the mix and sow the seed on top. Lightly cover with a small amount of mix, mist to dampen, and put in a tray. Don't forget to label!





Cover containers with a humidity dome. Hosta seeds do not need light to germinate, but I do put my trays under fluorescent lights for the warmth. You don't need fancy, expensive "grow lights." For years I used plain old shop light fixtures with one cool spectrum bulb and one warm spectrum bulb, hoping to offer the seedlings a fuller spectrum of light. Ideal temperature for germination is between 65-80 degrees Fahrenheit.



Seeds will begin to sprout in a couple of weeks. Rate of germination will vary quite a bit, so be patient. Once the young seedlings start to grow bigger and get crowded, it is recommended to up-pot those that catch your eye to grow on. To promote bigger roots you can use deeper cups and add shredded pine bark to the potting mix. Bottom watering is also highly recommended using a diluted fertilizer; something like Miracle Gro Tomato Food will work well.





Styrofoam cups  
8 oz.  
12 oz.  
16 oz.



Gently tease apart  
the roots



Nice vigor

Strong  
root system

Pleasing form or  
characteristics



Keep  
soil-less mix  
**LOOSE**  
Water



To prevent 'leggy' seedling, place seedlings as close  
to light source as possible (without touching)



Don't be afraid to "cull" or discard any seedlings that don't appeal to you. As the rest of your seedlings grow it is very easy to run out of room. Being selective can help focus your energy and effort on seedlings that you will be happy with in your garden.

When you see roots starting to come out of the bottom of your container it is a good time to up-pot again as the seedlings seem to like the fresh new pot and soil.



Growing hosta seedlings can be a great way to chase away the winter doldrums and can lead to an enjoyable winter activity that is very rewarding. Don't be afraid to give it a try!



## American Hosta Growers 2021 Hosta of the Year *H. 'Rainbow's End'*

By Michael Greanya

The 2021 Hosta of the Year selected by the American Hosta Growers Association is *H. 'Rainbow's End'* (Originator Hans Hansen registered 2005). This photo of *Rainbow's End* was taken by Hans in his garden.

Walters Gardens ([https://www.waltersgardens.com/photo\\_essay.php?ID=96](https://www.waltersgardens.com/photo_essay.php?ID=96)) says “(t)his

unique hosta exhibits incredibly variegated, shiny foliage. The bright yellow leaves of good substance have dark green margins that jet into the center, and the center brightens to creamy white in summer. It forms a medium sized mound of attractive foliage in the landscape”.

Believe me when I say that this is a real winner in any garden!!



According to the American Hosta Growers Association's website ([www.hostagrowers.org](http://www.hostagrowers.org)), their organization, "... is a trade organization for nurseries that specialize in the growing and sale of hostas. Its members include producers of hosta liners, wholesale landscape nurseries, wholesale and retail mail-order hosta nurseries, and hosta specialty nurseries that feature garden displays and local retail sales. A few of its purposes are to foster interest in hostas through marketing and educational programs, disseminate information on cultural practices and pest problems of hostas,

and help to standardize hosta nomenclature.

“With the increasing number of hosta cultivars being introduced each year it is increasingly difficult for nursery owners and gardeners to choose just the right hostas for their sales areas and gardens. To this end the

American Hosta Growers Association established the AHGA Hosta of the Year in 1996. It is selected by a vote of

AHGA members. Award winners are hostas that are good garden plants in all regions of the country, are widely available in sufficient supply, and retail for about \$15.00 in the year of selection.”

Rest assured that any Hosta of the Year selected by the American Hosta Growers Association will give your garden pizzazz and will wow visitors with a wide array of color, size, texture, and shape. In fact, if you are new to hostas but don't know which plants to purchase, the 25 Hosta of the Year plants posted on [www.hostagrowers.org](http://www.hostagrowers.org) will give you a great start and you won't have to spend a ton of money.

## ***Part II***

### ***The Bigger, the Better: Growing Humongous Hostas***

*By Don Rawson*

Hostas are wonderful plants. Found in nearly every garden center and nursery across America, hostas are some of the easiest perennials to grow. With a great variety of shapes, sizes, and colors, most members of the genus are reliable stalwarts of the garden, returning year after year without much muss and fuss to the gardener. In fact, some folks - perhaps you - have an extensive

collection of every kind imaginable, numbering into the tens, hundreds, or thousands.

However, if you are like me, having a sizeable number of hostas which are grown poorly is not as gratifying as growing a handful to their greatest potential. It is somewhat embarrassing to have friends walk through the garden when it is weedy and unkempt... and when the hostas, along with their companions, are struggling to survive. Conversely, it surely is more inviting to wander through a shady glade which is luscious and vibrant, full of life and bursting with excitement, flourishing with the most enormous specimens ever encountered!



In Part II of this series, we are covering Tips #4 - 6 on how to provide the perfect environment for cultivating some giants in your own personal sanctuary. I invite you to join me on



this journey to nurture these jaw-dropping mammoths to their largest dimensions.

#### **Tip #4: Select a Cultivar that gets BIG**

Let's face it - small and medium hostas have their place in the garden, but they will never, ever get BIG. It's in the genes. Simply put, to have BIG hostas, you must select the ones that get BIG. In my opinion, miniatures are fun and cute, but they just don't pack the punch that the goliaths can give.

It's simply about choosing the right hybrids. Some recommendations are 'Blue Angel', 'Blue Mammoth', 'Empress Wu', 'Komodo Dragon', 'Sum and Substance', and 'T Rex', but there are many more that "fit the bill". For a complete list, go to [www.hostalists.org](http://www.hostalists.org) and click on "Very Large Hostas". Just remember that planting a hosta that can become large is not a guarantee that it will do so! There are



various requirements which must be met. Following the steps in this series will help to ensure it.

#### **Tip #5: Allow Enough Space**

Giant hostas can become several feet in diameter. While standing in a crowd shoulder-to-shoulder is okay for a moment, it's no fun for the long haul. Give your hostas plenty of room! Fill the area between with smaller plants which are easier to move than the large ones. After all, the last thing we want to do is to be transplanting very large, mature hostas if we can avoid it.

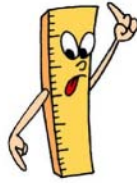
When choosing a site to grow these mammoths, stop and think about how large they will really become. The most enormous varieties can sometimes eventually span eight feet or more. Generally, large hostas look best when they are just touching leaf tips... so hostas which reach eight feet wide should be spaced eight feet apart. While it may seem a little extreme to leave this much space between individual plants, it will become more apparent as each one matures. Meanwhile, bare areas can be interplanted with smaller varieties or used to display garden art.

Plant tags and catalogues may not provide accurate plant dimensions. Begin by checking The Hostapedia for the size of each cultivar at maturity. Then, when laying out your gardening plot, make sure to leave enough room

so that one is not encroaching on the territory of another.

### Proper Spacing of Hostas

1. Miniature	6-12" Wide	Plant 10-18" apart
2. Small	1-2' Wide	Plant 18"- 2' apart
3. Medium	2' Wide	Plant 2' apart
4. Large	3 - 4' Wide	Plant 3 - 4' apart
5. Giant	4 - 8' Wide	Plant 4 - 8' apart



### Tip #6: Provide Adequate Light

Recently, I read somewhere that hostas absolutely love shade. It went on to say that they languish in the hot afternoon sun.

While it is true that hostas may experience some burnt leaf edges when grown in full sun, hostas are NOT shade loving - they are somewhat shade tolerant! Most cultivars do fine when grown in a good amount of sunlight. They often benefit from periods of sun exposure to keep their foliage vibrant and colorful. Overall, filtered sunlight and high overhead shade are best, and full sun for fragrant hostas.

In the South, some varieties will scorch in the hot afternoon sun, but all hostas, nevertheless, need some sunlight to grow. Like other plants,

hostas receive energy through photosynthesis. No energy, no growth. In fact, in the North, most hostas will grow well in full sun if given an ample supply of water, so evaluate your site to confirm there's adequate sunlight for optimum growth. It may surprise you how fast and large your hostas will get if grown in areas of bright sunlight when the other conditions are met. You will notice that the leaves get even larger in a semi-sunny location if your plants are regularly watered and fertilized.

Needless to say, don't buy a hosta in a tiny pot (even if it is a large-growing variety) and then plant it in deep shade... unless you want it to stay small forever! Spend a little more to purchase a large pot and get a jump-start, then provide it with plenty of light and water.

In the next edition, we will cover three more tips on growing huge hostas to their fullest potential - because when it comes to hostas: the bigger, the better!





# Oh Deer, Oh Deer, Oh Deer!

By Don Rawson

Oh deer... Bambi is in the garden!

Unfortunately, deer are a serious problem for many gardeners. Providing an effective means for repelling them can be a real challenge - simply because they are persistent and because they eat a lot! On average, a deer can consume anywhere from 6 to 8% of its body weight each day. That means that a 150-pound deer can eat up to 12 pounds of food (i.e., hostas) per day. Multiply that by 3, 4, or more - all dining on your hostas and other collectibles - for a period of many days and nights, and it becomes obvious why Bambi must be expelled from the garden!

While there are various methods intended to ward off deer or to restrict them from certain places in the

landscape — some of them probably more effective than others — in this series we will cover three easy techniques you may want to try. Let us know how successfully they work... we all need to know!

## Method #1: Installation of a Green Wire Deer Fence

The Green Wire Deer Fence technique was shared with me by a Facebook

friend, June Nestle. June lives in Michigan as well and has extensive plantings of hostas throughout her forested landscape.

Perhaps like you, June has tried various procedures and products for fending off these pesky browsers. Some of the commercial products - like Hinder, Liquid Fence, and Deer Away - apparently work if multiple applications are faithfully made throughout the

season. There are even homemade concoctions, some of which include



Photo by John Gamradt



rotten eggs, garlic, and chili pepper (yuck!). And then there are some who swear by Milorganite, an all-natural, slow-release fertilizer made from treated... well, you know what.



June wrote, “I was excited to learn about a one-time-use spray that would keep deer away all summer, but what I’ve found here is that I also would be kept out of the gardens by the stench, so I will probably resort to using it only on the beds I don’t go into and the ones a loooong ways from the house!”

June’s experience — including the unpleasant application of some of the commercially-available repellents — has led her to improvise with items from around the house: a spool of

plastic-coated plant wire, some cheap stakes, and a package of bells left over from Christmas. The green plant wire blends in with the background and holds up fairly well. “My suggestion is to replace the wire every three years,” she remarked. “They broke through the fences last fall while we were gone, but the wire was old.”

On another note, the author of this article has personally used 30# monofilament fishline and has had good results. But June commented, “I didn’t like the fishline because it was something I ran into.”

The posts she uses to attach the green wire are metal with a green plastic coating. June says, “I buy the long ones at the farm store and cut them in half with a hacksaw. I string the wire (with a bell on it) between the posts about the height so that when they try to take a bite, their neck hits the wire. They can’t see what it is, plus the bell spooks them.” Furthermore, June mentioned, “I like the big bells so I can easily see if a fence has come down. You can’t see the wire or poles easily, and if you don’t want to see the bells, then use the small ones! I buy the bells right after Christmas when they are at least half off.”

Oh, deer! Are you having a deer problem, too? This seems like a simple and affordable solution that is worth a try. Quick and easy to install. Give it a go and let us know if this method works for you!



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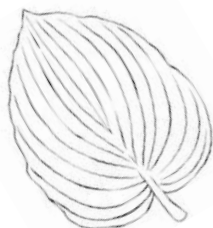
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Photos by Marla Greanya





## *Membership in the Michigan Hosta Society*

If you wish to find out more about Hosta, please consider joining the Michigan Hosta Society. We welcome new members and friends who share our interest in hosta and their many uses in the landscape. The society maintains a large hosta display at Hidden Lake Gardens near Tipton, where many varieties of hosta can be seen. "The Benedict Hosta Hillside" is one of only two nationally designated Hosta display gardens.

### Activities of MHS include:

- ▶ A summer tour of gardens that feature Hosta
- ▶ An auction/sale of hostas contributed by members
- ▶ Speakers and educational programs
- ▶ Local chapter meetings
- ▶ A workday and information sharing at Hidden Lake Gardens in Tipton where the Society has a demonstration garden
- ▶ A listing of MHS members who retail Hosta
- ▶ A yearly membership directory

Members receive the Michigan Society Newsletter "Hosta Happenings," as well as the newsletter of the Great Lakes Regional Hosta Society. If you are interested in joining please complete the attached application form.

You may also want to join The American Hosta Society. They have two colorful journals each year, and an annual national convention featuring a Hosta Show, garden tours, scientific programs and a plant auction.

Contact: [www.americanhostasociety.org](http://www.americanhostasociety.org)

## *MHS Membership Application*

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_

First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Last name of 2nd member: \_\_\_\_\_

First name of 2nd member: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address:

\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail:

\_\_\_\_\_

Choice of **either** black and white newsletter via First Class US Mail or full color newsletter via e-mail. All the pictures are in color and there are often bonus pictures not included in the mailed version. Please check one: Mail ☐ E-mail ☐

Check if you wish to receive an updated membership directory when published: ☐

New Member: \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal: \_\_\_\_\_

Dues are \$15 per household for up to two people, good for 2 years.

Total remitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:

Michigan Hosta Society  
2509 Wembly Lane  
Troy, MI 48084-1280

Make checks payable to: The Michigan Hosta Society