

MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS

Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society



President's Message



As I thought about this message, I tried to think of some way to start that didn't sound trite or banal. It has been a challenging year for all of us. My extended family has been fortunate throughout this pandemic. We had only one mild case of the Covid-19 virus. My son-in-law said that the reaction he had to the vaccinations was worse than the virus.

Hidden Lake Gardens is partially open. The buildings are still shuttered, but activities out of doors can take place. To this end the Michigan Hosta Society is planning the annual Spring workday and board meeting May 22 starting at 9:00 a.m. Hidden Lake Gardens is located at 6214 Monroe Road (Hwy M-50), Tipton, MI 49287. We will focus on a general cleanup and removal of weeds, leaves and some invasive hellebores, as well as any other plants that may be threatening the

Hillside. Please bring trowels, buckets, gloves, or other maintenance tools you feel will be helpful. A few shovels might also be needed. We will not be allowed to share food and water except with persons from the same household, so please bring what you might need for the day. We must also maintain 6' distancing and wear masks while at Hidden Lake Gardens. The main building will be closed to the public, but we will have access to a bathroom and we will announce which ones will be available the day of our event. Everyone is welcome to attend. The board meeting will be held in the picnic pavilion.

The Michigan Hosta Society is looking for a new location for the annual plant sale and leaf show as we are unable to use the Plant and Soil Science Headhouse on the MSU East Lansing campus. As a consequence, we are no longer sponsoring the MSU Garden Day. If any of you know of a location that is large enough to meet our needs, please contact me or one of the board members. We will not be holding

the plant sale and leaf show in 2021, but hopefully we can in 2022.

Please mark your calendars for July 15-17 when the Southwest Michigan Hosta Society and the West Michigan Hosta Society will host the 2021 American Hosta Society's national convention virtually.

Register for the virtual convention at www.ahs2021.org. It promises to be spectacular. Many thanks to Don Rawson and Ed Steinbrecher and all the volunteers who for several years have worked very hard to work to pull this all together for us.

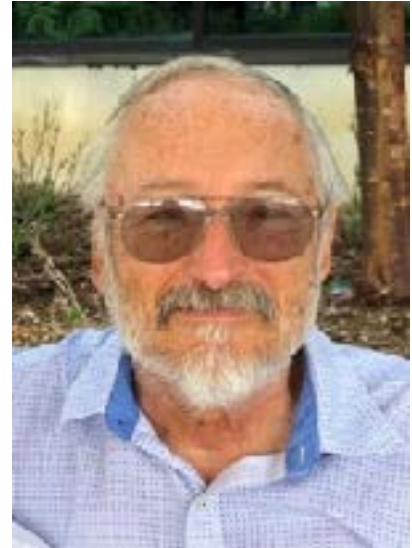
I am saddened by the passing of Jim Munson. It has been a long battle as he first became ill while he was President of the MHS.

Please consider joining us on the Hillside in May as I'm sure it can use a lot of TLC. We will also be having our annual meeting, workday, luncheon, and plant auction in August. We will set the date for the August meeting at our board meeting in May. Join us!

Sincerely,
Grey Gitzen
MHS President



In memory of Jim Munson



Jim Munson passed away on Thursday, April 1, 2021 at the age of 77. Jim was born in Swanton, Ohio to the late Stanley and Margaret Munson. He graduated from Ohio State University with a Bachelor's degree in Pharmacy and earned his PhD in Pharmaceutics from the University of Wisconsin. Jim joined Upjohn as a scientist, went into management and was the recipient of The Upjohn Award in 1995. He was also named Executive of the Year by the Kalamazoo Chapter of Professional Secretaries. Jim retired from Pharmacia in 2003 as the Group Vice President of Quality. Jim was a member of West Kalamazoo Christian Church. His passions included spending time with family, travel, photography and growing and hybridizing hostas. Jim loved the Grand Canyon and rafted through it 7 times.



Don Rawson is back in his third installment in his series on HOW TO GROW HUMONGOUS HOSTAS. His Tips 7-9 get right to the meat of what it takes to grow them big. I mean really BIG! Root competition, water and mulch and fertilizer are so very important for any hostas, but very important when you're talking about growing the really big plants. Find out how and why Don does it in this article.

Michael Greanya

Part III

The Bigger, the Better: Growing Humongous Hostas

by Don Rawson

Humongous hostas make outstanding focal points in the garden. These impressive giants readily attract attention whenever we encounter them, and we are lured by their beauty and stature. However, enormous hostas grown to perfection seldom are the work of happenstance... they are the product of a gardener's careful planning, hard work, nurture and care. With

Photo by Bill Goff



Photo by Jane Hanna

Photo by Don Rawson



this series, we are covering 12 tips on how to provide the perfect environment for cultivating humongous specimens in your own garden because, if you are like me, the bigger, the better!

Here are the first 6 tips which were previously offered:

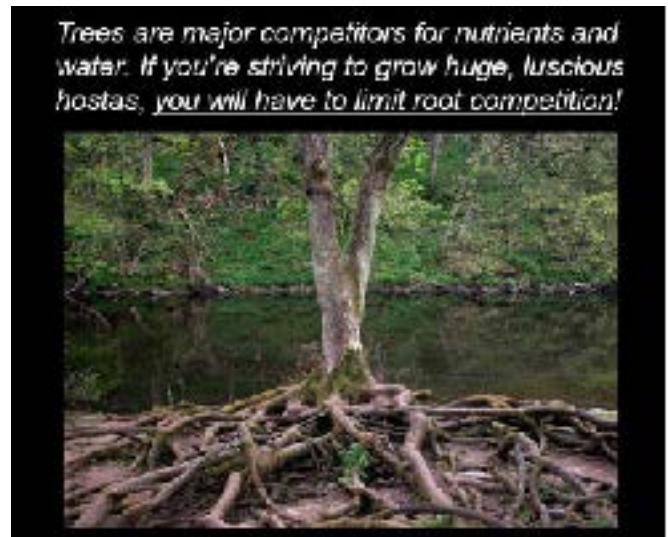
1. Select the Best Location
2. Prepare the Planting Site Well
3. Plant on a Raised Mound
4. Select a Cultivar that gets BIG
5. Allow Enough Space
6. Provide Adequate Light

In Part III, Tips #7 - 9 will focus on tree root competition, mulching and fertilizing, and watering your hostas. I invite you to join me on this journey to grow these jaw-dropping mammoths to their greatest potential.

Tip #7: Prevent Root Competition

Tree roots are fierce competitors for water and nutrients. A dry, shady area with low nutrient content and compacted soil is great for a moss garden, but hostas will need to fight hard to survive.

If you've notice that your hostas are mysteriously getting smaller year after year, even with varieties that are supposed to be large, there's a good chance that something else is sucking the water and nutrients away from the plant. The number one culprit is buried tree



roots. Just under the surface, there's an invisible battle going on. Trees are like giant sponges, wicking up an enormous amount of water. If a hosta is planted nearby, the tree takes all the energy and unfortunately, there's nothing left for the hosta.

Roots of trees often extend two to three times the radius of the crown, and they grow where the moisture and oxygen are available. In fact, most absorbing roots are found very near the surface - in the upper 12 inches of soil. Furthermore, besides

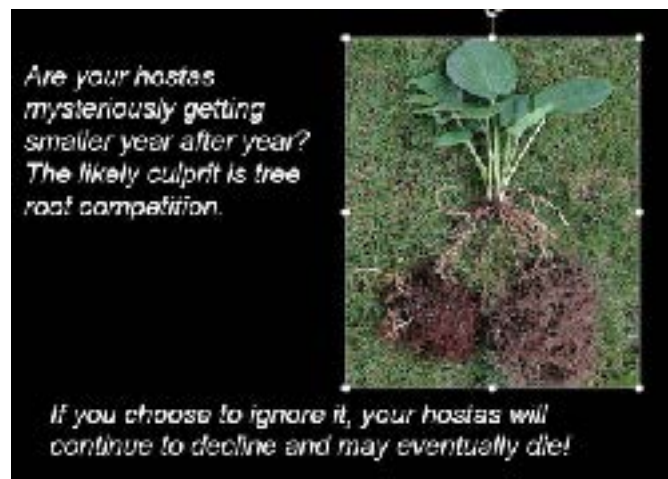


Photo by Jane Hanna

taking the water and nutrients, some trees create an environment which is just too shady for good hosta growth. Remember that our #1 favorite plant is shade tolerant, not shade loving. Hostas need sunlight to grow!

Tree selection is important when laying out a garden. The best trees for the hosta garden have a deep root system, few fibrous roots, and an open canopy. Avoid ashes, aspens, beeches, lindens, silver maples, red maples, and willows. Some trees which are highly recommended for hosta gardeners are hickory, honeylocust, katsura, kousa dogwood, Japanese maple, paperbark maple, oaks, and witchhazel.



Preventing root competition may involve spading around your hostas to shear off encroaching tree roots, planting in containers or raised beds, or installing a barrier to keep tree roots out. Adding a few inches of rich topsoil around your trees is also an option, as long as you



don't overdo it. Too much additional soil or mulch around trees can suffocate roots which need oxygen, so raising the grade excessively could eventually kill a sensitive, mature tree.

In any case, large hostas which are vigorous growers can compete with trees much better than small, young plantings. However, hostas planted near trees require additional water and fertilizer. If you eventually find that tree root competition is too great in your garden, you may need to dig up your hostas and relocate them to a new area, even if it requires building a pergola or shade structure. Or, you could consider eliminating a few of your trees.

Tip #8: Mulch and Fertilize

The benefits of mulch should not be under-estimated. Mulch holds moisture, maintains roots at an even temperature,

blocks weeds, reduces erosion, and helps to keep fungal diseases down by reducing splashing on plants. Mulching around your hostas and allowing the mulch to decompose year after year will help keep your soil in good condition and will also keep the soil under the mulch moist. Hostas love this!

Moreover, mulch makes the garden attractive. A freshly-mulched, weed-free garden is so appealing! Suitable materials are shredded bark, wood chips, pine needles, cocoa hulls, shredded leaves, or stone/ lava rock. Apply mulch in late spring or early summer, 2-3" deep. Landscape cloth and black plastic are a no-no! And don't mulch over the crown of the hosta, as good airflow around the crown is important to preventing disease.



The application of a balanced fertilizer (such as 10-10-10) will give your hostas a boost in the spring, but ideally, a soil test should be performed first to see what

nutrients need to be added. Then apply a second feeding 4 to 6 weeks after the leaves emerge to give your hostas an extra nudge.



Some gardeners prefer a slow-release granular fertilizer such as Osmocote. Organic amendments such as blood meal, alfalfa meal, or Plant-tone are very beneficial as well. Fertilizer should be sprinkled around the dripline, not applied directly over the crown.

In any case, try to find a fertilizer that has some added Magnesium, or apply Espom salt. Epsom salt is hydrated magnesium sulfate; it consists of 10% Magnesium and 13% Sulfur, both of which are secondary essential nutrients after Nitrogen, Phosphorus, and Potassium. Magnesium in Epsom salt increases water retention, helps in better intake of nutrients, and most importantly, in the creation of chlorophyll, on which the process of photosynthesis depends. Similarly, sulfur

also participates in the development of chlorophyll, increases the plant's resistance to diseases, and helps in growth. Mix 2 tablespoons of Epsom salt in 1 gallon of water and spray once in a month on the foliage in the rapid growth period. When growth slows, reduce the quantity to 1 tablespoon. This foliar application will keep your hostas lush and healthy.

In addition, Bob Solberg recommends fertilizing your hostas at least once in spring with a liquid fertilizer. Even if you use a slow-release granular fertilizer, foliar feeding can make a big difference. You can use a 20-20-20 formulation or one with a higher nitrogen amount (the first



Photo by Michael Greanya

number), but try to find one that has some added Magnesium. It is best to apply this bonus fertilizer just as the second set of hosta leaves are starting to flush out, or 4 to 6 weeks after the hostas emerge. This little extra boost will help that second set of leaves expand to a size similar to those first big leaves.



Tip #9: Water, Water, Water!

Hostas are thirsty, especially on hot, windy days and during extended dry spells. Like people, they need plenty of water, especially during the driest periods of summer. They thrive naturally in damp areas of Asia, so try to mimic their natural habitat as best as you can. Conscientious gardeners ensure that they provide a good water supply to keep large leafy plants growing well all season long.

Hostas survive well in drought, but to grow these monsters to their fullest, don't depend solely on Mother Nature. Water

regularly at the base of the plant. There is a wise saying: You cannot over-water a hosta. Drown the plant thoroughly once a week with a heavy watering until the ground is well-saturated, then come back with a hose two hours later and water until the ground is saturated again. Wait a week, then repeat the process. They will appreciate the attention!

For overhead watering, water every two weeks with Miracle-Gro. Hostas get really huge when given a liquid fertilizer at 50-100 ppm nitrogen.

In the next edition, we will cover the final tips on growing huge hostas to their fullest potential. Following these tips will help you to have some humongous specimens in your own garden, because when it comes to hostas, the bigger, the better!



American Halo Lady and Isobel Barnet

Profile of Hans Hansen

Hans Hansen is the Director of New Plant Development for Walters Gardens in Zeeland, Michigan. If you've been around hostas for any length of time, you know that Hans has developed many well-known hosta cultivars through his breeding program. You might not realize though that he has hybridized and registered over 100 hostas with the American Hosta Society. Hostas that you may know and have in your garden might include Atlantis, Dance With Me, Earth Angel, Hanky Panky, Hope, Journey's End, Neptune, Pandora's Box, Rainbow's End (the American Hosta Growers Association hosta of the year 2021), Spartacus, Stained Glass, Touch Of Class, Vulcan, and the list goes on and on but you get the idea. Hans is one of the premier hosta hybridizers and continues to bring great new cultivars to the market. Hans' recent introduction, H. 'Silly String' will be our AHS convention plant this year; another incentive to register for the AHS convention! This plant will be sent to you as part of your registration for the convention.

You might ask, how did Hans get interested

in gardening and, specifically, how did he become involved in hosta hybridizing? Well, in this exclusive article, Hans will tell us how he became fascinated with plants and what led him to become one of the top hybridizers in the country, and not just hostas. Equally fascinating are the pictures of him at a young age in the garden and with some of the great hosta hybridizers from the past.

Michael Greanya

I have been growing hostas nearly all my life. My earliest memories of hostas were as a small child growing up on my parents' dairy farm in southwestern Minnesota. My greatest influence into the world of plants lived a half a mile away – an easy



Hans, 4 years old



Hans on Garden Float 1976

bike ride or walk for me. I spent hours with Margery in her garden weeding, picking flowers, learning about plants. She was a very kind, generous person, and freely shared plants with me. When she and her husband retired and moved off the farm to town, they told my father I could have whatever plants were left. That was where I got my first baptisia plant after my dad broke the shovel trying to get the ancient plant out of the ground. Margery had hostas on the north and east sides of her farmhouse. She never shared

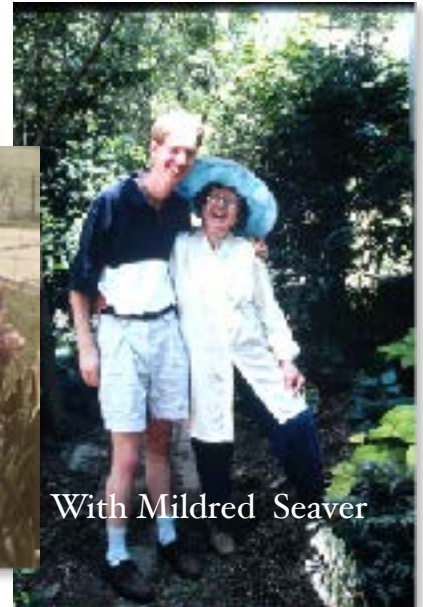


Hybridizing lillies as a teenager

At Minnesota Peony Show



H. Silk Road



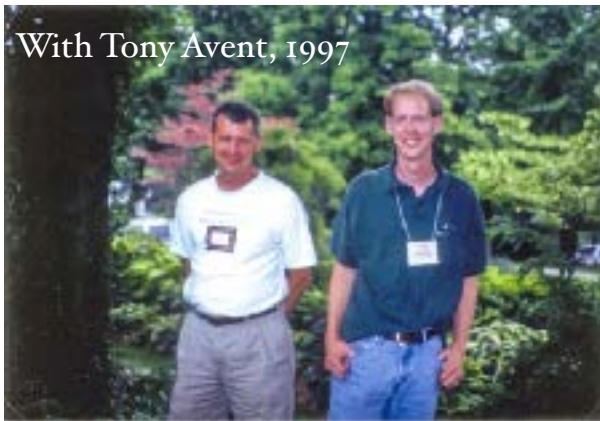
5 years old

With Mildred Seaver

With Eleanor Lachman



With Tony Avent, 1997



With Hideko Gowen and Herb Benedict



Minnesota garden

them with me because she said they didn't need to be divided, they got better with age.



Teenager garden

My first hosta plants came from Farmer Seed and Nursery, the garden center in Windom, Minnesota. They had named varieties such as 'August Moon', 'Krossa Regal', 'Honeybells', and 'Blue Max'. I used my money from my birthdays to buy them. After seeing Wayside Nursery Catalog, I knew there were more varieties out there that I liked. As a youngster on a limited budget, I couldn't afford the Wayside prices, but did mail order Frances Williams and Gold Standard from another mail order company.

After high school I attended college at the University of Minnesota, Waseca. It was a two-year Agricultural program. My plant biology teacher was Clayton Oslund, who also had a small retail mail-order company called Shady Oaks Nursery that specialized in shade plants and had a laminar flow hood and autoclave for a

small lab that did tissue culture. As a lab requirement for plant propagation, we spent time working under the hood in the small tissue culture room micropropagating plants. I got a part time, weekend job working in the tissue culture lab at Shady Oaks during college while at the University of MN St. Paul campus. It was during this time that I really expanded my hosta collection at my parents' house and had varieties that were new at that time including montana 'Aureo marginata', 'Zounds', 'Blue Angel', 'Grand Tiara', and 'Gold Edger'.

After graduating from college, I worked at Shady Oaks Nursery for 15 years as Director of Research and Development, managing the tissue culture lab. Shady



At Shady Oaks

Oaks Nursery expanded from primarily a retail mail order nursery to supplying wholesale tissue culture liners, and finally exclusively as a wholesale producer of

tissue culture hostas. During this time, I also worked on ploidy conversion and converted 'June' to 'Touch of Class', 'Sea Thunder' to 'American Sweetheart', 'Summer Serenade' to 'Roy Klehm', 'Fragrant Bouquet' to 'Sweet Innocence', as well as others. I also was hybridizing hostas and developed 'Prairie Sky', 'Neptune', and 'Restless Sea' during that time. I gardened on a 5-acre wooded lot that was a native, untouched wildflower haven. Millions of bloodroot, hepatica, isopyrum, erythronium, spring beauty, and *Arum canadensis* grew there, as well as *Trillium cernuum*, *Uvularria grandiflora* and *Phlox divaricata*. The sandy soil also grew large hostas, and I had an extensive hosta



collection of over 2000 named varieties as well as seedling. The beds were designed by genetic relevance – the montana types were in one bed, the nakaianas in another, sieboldianas in their own space, and



tokudama in theirs. It was a great way to evaluate and research different and similar varieties together.

On June 4, 2009 I moved to Walters Gardens in Zeeland, Michigan to work in New Plant Development. My dream job included hybridizing plants as well as evaluating seedlings and working with other plant breeders to introduce plants for Walters Gardens. My passion still includes hostas, but I am also working with around 70 additional genera. My staff and I make hundreds of hosta crosses every year. Since 2009 over 5000 different sets of crosses have resulted in tens of thousands of seedlings. During the past 11 years in Michigan my work with hostas resulted in plants like 'Waterslide', 'Diamond Lake', 'Age of Gold', in addition

to several new introductions like ‘Silly String’, ‘Wild Imagination’, and ‘When I Dream’.

I downsized my gardening footprint and increased the diversity of plant material I could grow moving from a zone 4b/5a, five-acre property to a zone 6b city lot. I have had to be a lot more creative with plant combinations and planting strategies to be able to grow the plants I like, but my goal is to have something interesting in my garden all seasons. My landscape design is a layered look, with shrubs, conifers, tall oriental lilies interspersed with many other perennials. Except for the rock garden, the plants are shoulder to shoulder and weeding is very minimal. The shade garden features hostas, but also has many other perennials to give the beds long season of interest.



Photos by Hans Hansen



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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

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:

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Troy, MI 48084-1280

Make checks payable to: The Michigan Hosta Society