

# MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS



Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society



*In memory of*  
**Clarence Owens**  
*11/8/1925 - 10/5/2022*



We are dedicating this issue of Hosta Happenings to Clarence Owens, who passed away October 5, 2022. His contribution to the Michigan Hosta Society was significant. Clarence — along with Jim Wilkins, Herb Benedict, and Gil Jones — is credited with bringing the dream of creating a public hosta garden into reality. He was Michigan Hosta Society chair of Hosta Hillside at Hidden Lake Gardens in Tipton, Michigan for a little over 30 years. But he was much more than just that. His entire life was devoted to teaching. Even after he retired from teaching high school biology, his passion for preservation of butterflies, birds, plants and, yes, even snakes, was infectious to all who knew him. We all wanted to learn more from him and we looked up to him for wisdom and inspiration. And now we will miss him dearly.



# Why I Love *Epimediums*

by Hans Hansen



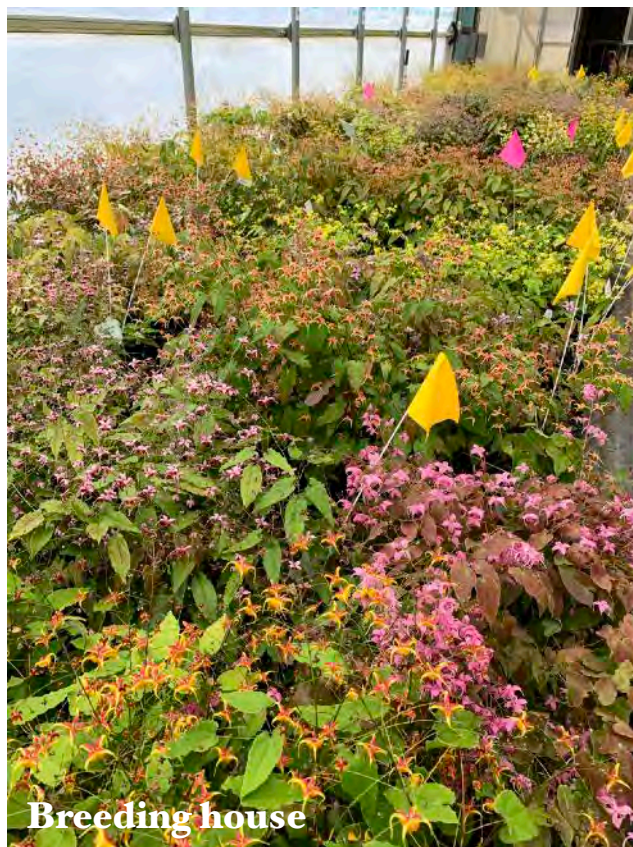
Hans with *Epimedium* 'Caramel'

Unlike growing up with a garden full of peonies, iris, and lilies, I did not grow up with epimedium. The first exposure was from an article in *Flower and Garden Magazine* when I was in High School. The article written by Clayton Olsund was ironic. After high school I made the decision to go to college for Floriculture and Greenhouse Production and I ended up working for him at his company – Shady Oaks Nursery.

The gist of Olsund's article was that epimediums are durable perennials with dainty foliage and small fairy-like flowers. He spoke of their ability to adapt to dry shade, compete with tree roots, and form a nearly impenetrable weed-free ground cover. To this day I remember the article, although I was a young guy on a dairy farm at the time. As Olsund said, every plant has a purpose; the vegetables for fresh eating, and the perennials

and annuals at the end of the garden are useful for cut flowers. We took a flower arrangement to church every Sunday. Mom was diligent about sharing cut flowers with folks in nursing homes or apartments who didn't have a garden to tend anymore. So, a plant grown only to cover the ground and keep weeds at bay was a foreign concept for us farmers. Since we lived on what had been a former prairie, there really wasn't any shade except on the north side of the house. That was in the 1980s, and the epimediums known in the horticulture circle were 'Rubrum,' 'Sulphureum,' 'Neo-sulphureum,' and *Epimedium x warleyense*.

Soon after the Flower and Garden article, I noticed listings in *Wayside Gardens* that also included *Epimedium grandiflorum* 'White Queen'. Wayside, with their lovely pictorial catalogs and thoughtful script, promoted them as the "aristocrats of the ground covers".



Breeding house

All photos in this article courtesy of Hans Hansen unless otherwise indicated





**E. 'Spine Tingler'**

I finished college in 1993 and by 1994 had purchased a property with over 5 acres of native woods in southern Minnesota where I developed a shade garden. In 1998, after working for Clayton Oslund at Shady Oaks Nursery for 5 years I attended the PPA national convention in Boston, Massachusetts and met Darrell Probst. He spoke at the conference on epimedium, his deep passion for the genus, and the amazing diversity of the plants. He had recently botanized in rural China and saw and collected incredible new species. Forms with larger flowers, longer inflorescence, and attractive foliage. Magical color combinations that prior to the reopening of China were completely unknown. Darrell also hybridized species together and named some of his hybrids. Unlike the classic forms, these were exciting to me. I immediately bought some of the selections available through his mail order nursery, Garden Vision Nursery.

Until the time I left my garden in Waseca, Minnesota, I continued to passionately grow

epimediums. To me they weren't utilitarian plants to cover ground in the shade where more desirable plants would fail, but fascinating spring perennials that complimented hostas, while providing a lighter, airy texture as opposed to the large, architectural hosta, and the linear Martagon lilies.

Epimediums are great companions for hostas; they both enjoy shade and moist, well-drained soils. I know they are promoted as tolerating dry shady soil, but the happiest thriving epimedium I have grown are always in moist well drained soil. Unlike hostas, they have deer and rabbit resistance – especially their old foliage, and unlike hostas they emerge and flower earlier in the spring and linger much later into the fall after the hostas have gone dormant. Many species and hybrids of epimedium are evergreen, or in the northern tier of their hardiness range at least have "persistent" foliage like a hellebore.



**E. 'Songbirds'**



The wealth of fine epimediums introduced by Darrell at Garden Vision include 'Pink Champagne', 'Domino', and 'Spine Tinger'.

Darrell referred to 'Sandy Claws' (named by Tony Avent) as *E. wushanense* - spiny form. He also had a listing of wild collected species and classic Japanese cultivars that were verified to be accurate. At that time many epimediums were not understood or mislabeled in the trade.

Like so many early pioneers working on genera, Darrell's work was continued by Tony Avent at Plant Delights Nursery after his focus changed from epimedium to coreopsis. Tony acquired the species, cultivars, and hybrids offered by Darrell and took them to the next level. Some of his introductions include 'Pretty in Pink', 'Songbirds', and 'Super Mottle'. Tony's focus on plant selection and introduction was vigor, distinction and garden performance.



*E. Pink Champagne*



Photo Courtesy of Tony Avent

*Epimedium pubescens* 'Clean Hans'

In 1998 and again for 4 four additional years I had the privilege of joining a group of plant folks from the USA to botanize plant material

in Western China (Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces). It was amazing to see how and where these woodland plants grew. We saw *E.*

*membranaceum* and *Epimedium x omiense* growing on Mt. Emei in rich vegetation. We also saw *E.*

*pubescens* growing along the fields and terraces used for rice production. A representative form from the 2003 expedition to Guaengyuan, Sichuan was named 'Clean Hans'. This selection is more compact than the typical

form and is covered with masses of white flowers well above the foliage. The most amazing experience was seeing *Epimedium davidii* growing in the wild. It was growing on the sides of a slope inside of a waterfall. I guess the shade was provided by sheets of water. The slope provided excellent drainage – but unlike the garden lore we were accustomed to, the plant was not growing in a

dry environment competing with tree roots for every drop of moisture. Darrell's 'Emerald Sheen' would be comparable to what we observed in Sichuan.

In 2009 I began working for the folks at Walters Gardens, and early on began acquiring and evaluating recent hybrids and species that were of garden value. The new hybrids from material originating in Western China propagated at a different rate than the older species and cultivars. The first three varieties we added to our wholesale production were 'Domino', 'Pink Champagne', and 'Amber Queen'. Soon after 'Sandy Claws' and 'Spine Tangler' were added, and more recently 'Pretty in Pink', 'Songbirds', and 'Rigoletto'.



***E. Art Deco***

In 2014 after amassing a nice assortment of species and hybrids I began making hand pollinations. Crossing epimedium has been one of the most challenging as well as most rewarding projects of my tenure at Walters. All of the epimedium are grown in pots in ambient temperature greenhouses (minimum heat 38F, cooling at 42F during the winter, and retaining plastic tops in the summer). This mimics the outside growth cycle of the plant but prevents the plants from being damaged by late spring frosts, getting the pollen wet from rain, and inadvertently

pollinated by insects. Also, the plants are easier to pollinate when the pots are set on a table with supplemental lighting rather than having to lie on one's side on the ground to make the cross. They are also easier to divide and propagate.

Crossing epimedium is as much of an art as a science. I use jeweler's magnifiers to enlarge the flowers. Epimedium pollen ranges in color from brilliant yellow to a fluorescent neon green. Using a forceps, the anthers are removed and used to dab pollen on the stigma of the epimedium selected to be the pod parent. On most epimediums I use one pollen parent per scape and repeat the cross for several days up to 2 weeks. It is easier to label



**Advancement in flower size**

the cross and collect the seed when doing it this way, and the crosses are replicated to ensure the full range of genetic expression. The flower stems and pedicels are very fragile, and after much trial and experience I now label the cross and put the breeder tag on the stem before making the cross. Too much frustration has been experienced doing it in the reverse order only to break off the flowers trying to affix the tag after pollinating the flowers. After the cross is successful and the seed pod swells, the inflorescence with the pods is bagged with cheese cloth to prevent the ripening pods from expelling the



seeds. The time it takes from pollination to ripe seed is temperature dependent, but usually takes 3 to 4 weeks. Once we see ripening seed pods or pods turning tan in color the crosses are accessioned into the database and planted immediately. The seeds are sown in quart pots, covered with a layer of Turface, and then a layer of chicken grit. The reason for the top dressings is to keep the top of the soil uniformly moist (the seeds are tiny), and to prevent or discourage moss and liverwort from growing. It will take almost a calendar year from pollination to germination. The pots are kept uniformly moist in a shaded greenhouse that will drop down to 38F over winter. The following early spring the seedlings emerge, and after a month they are cellulated into 1" cells.



**Bagged pods**

The seedlings are fertilized with a constant liquid feed. Once fully rooted into a 1" cell, they are transplanted into the equivalent of a 3" pot. Occasionally late in the summer or fall we see a random flower scape on the most vigorous crosses but it isn't until the following year we see full bloom on 90 percent of the seedlings. If a seedling doesn't flower at that point it is discarded. Total number of sets of crosses during the breeding program to date is 462.

The plants are aged an additional year and up-potted into a 3-gallon pot before considering for preliminary selection. We value the following traits on epimedium seedling: Great vigor in the garden and yield in nursery production; attractive foliage; long inflorescence held on strong stems above the foliage; long season of bloom (from secondary lateral branches and the length of the inflorescence); large flower size; and attractive flowers with strong colors, vivid color contrasts; and visual beauty. In production, epimedium may be



**Hans working**



propagated or transplanted about anytime the growth is not soft (very early spring before emergence, and then summer through fall after the foliage hardens). Epimedium foliage should not be cut off or removed during propagation. We propagate our plants at Walters Gardens one hundred percent by division – a practice that takes many years to reach wholesale quantities. The plants are grown in containers on benches off the ground to ensure the plants offered are free from nematodes, which are unfortunately a problem for classic epimedium varieties grown in field production. Finally, every variety is tested for viruses before the propagation process and routinely during to ensure the plants are free of viruses. Perhaps the most common virus known to affect epimedium is the Tobacco Rattle Virus (TRV), which causes unsightly yellow mottled foliage and is spread underground by nematodes. Because of the added steps in the nursery process and using traditional division methods rather

than tissue culture, epimediums are generally one of the more expensive plants in the nursery. However, like a baptisia or peony, they will reward you with years and years of value, and most likely live with you during the entire span that you garden at your home.

We as gardeners have been blessed to have been living in a period in time when a new influx of genetic diversity became available to the western world – and even

China itself. With the pioneering work of Darrell, Robin White, and Tony Avent, new hybrids are now available for shade gardeners that folks in years past would only dream about.

Epimedium can provide much needed textural contrast to hostas, and they also work well in mass planting, rock gardens, and cascading down from retaining walls. With the creative minds of plant geneticists, the best is yet to come for the world of epimedium.



## The following is a list of my personal favorite *Epimedium* in the trade:

- ‘Caramel’ is perhaps my favorite yellow – a cultivar of a recently described species from Jincheng, Sichuan and named after the locality in 2014. This was one of those incredible cases where a gardener could purchase a plant new to science for their garden before it had a species assigned to it. The other *epimedium* that this happened to was ‘Spine Tinger’. *Epimedium* ‘Caramel’ has very long inflorescences with dozens of yellow flowers and lateral side branches, it remains in flower longer than about any other *epimedium* I grow. On a personal note, I ordered this from Dan Hinkley’s Heronswood nursery and it was shipped the day before they closed. The cultivar ‘The Giant’ is another selection of *E. jinchengshanense*. The flowers may be larger than ‘Caramel’ but lack the intensity of the color, and the stems are extremely lax.
- ‘Pink Champagne’ sets the bar for any other *epimedium*. Fantastic in garden vigor and for the floral display held on strong stems above the foliage, the bicolored pink flowers have a strong contrast. If I were to grow only one *epimedium* variety, this would be it.
- ‘Domino’ ranks high in my opinion for garden vigor and height. Although the color pattern is not as intense as ‘Pink Champagne’, it forms a great patch over time in the garden. I planted this in the Living Catalog at work, chiseling the plants between the surface roots of a Bradford Pear that had the volcano mulch treatment around the trunk.
- ‘Amber Queen’, a cross made by Robin White of England, is the first of the

*epimedium* hybrids to hold a US patent. Rich gold flowers are held on strong stems above the foliage. The foliage is top notch and is the perfect foil for the floral presentation. Also important in garden design as it is later to flower than many other selections.

- ‘Pretty in Pink’ has bright pink flowers held well above the clump that is a recent hybrid by Tony Avent. In nursery production with reliable moisture and fertility this one consistently re-blooms in the fall (September in Michigan).
- ‘Night Mistress’, an *Epimedium acuminatum* selection, has incredible contrast between the white sepals and dark purple inner petals. This one is best planted on a slope or on the top of a retaining wall as the flowers arch sideways.
- ‘Sandy Claws’ was named by Tony Avent of Plant Delights Nursery and is the same clone as *Epimedium wushanense* - spiny leaf form, a 2006 wild collected form Darrell discovered in Western China. This has amazing copper newly emerging leaves that look like a holly leaf. Creamy white flowers occur on congested flower scapes. I would grow this one for the foliage alone.



**E. 'Sandy Claws'**



## Unusual Woodlanders for the Shade Garden: Strawberry Begonia

by Don Rawson

If there ever was a plant with an identity crisis, it surely must be the Strawberry Begonia (*Saxifraga stolonifera*). It is not a strawberry nor a begonia, and is not closely related to either. It is also called Strawberry Geranium, but it's not a geranium. Take your pick: a slew of other names include Mother of Thousands, Creeping Rockfoil, Aaron's Beard, Roving Sailor, and Creeping Saxifrage.

***Saxifraga stolonifera* has beautiful  
round leaves etched in silver**



Photo by Don Rawson

If you're looking for a colorful, easy-to-care-for plant, add strawberry begonia to the list. Native to China, Japan, and South Korea, *Saxifraga stolonifera* thrives in forests and meadows, even on rock cliffs at altitudes to 15,000 ft. The plant spreads by strawberry-like runners and has begonia/geranium-like leaves – which explains why it is often called



Photo by Carol Weber

Strawberry Begonia and Strawberry Geranium. In reality, it is a mat-forming perennial of the saxifrage family, Saxifragaceae, hardy to USDA Zone 5. The clusters of small but attractive flowers which bloom during late spring and early summer have white, pointed petals and a bright yellow ovary.

The real attraction of the Strawberry Begonia, however, is the foliage. Rounded, hairy dark green leaves (to 4" wide) are marbled with silver veining on top and have pink-red undersides.

Strawberry Begonia prefers a sheltered spot with full or partial shade and will flourish in humus-rich, well-drained soil. Bright, indirect light is also fine. Just make sure that any direct rays from the sun are blocked or filtered. This charming little plant does not generally do well in the sunshine.

Like strawberry plants, the stolons allow *Saxifraga stolonifera* to spread easily, and thus the name Mother of Thousands in reference to the plantlets that form at the stolon tips. Its creeping silvery-green foliage makes good ground cover, although it is not overly aggressive. Unwanted plantlets are shallow-rooted and can be weeded out easily. In favorable conditions, it is semi-evergreen.

## A Wonderful Woodlander

There are a few tough and versatile plants that I appreciate more and more each year, and Strawberry Begonia is one of them. It is perfect for the woodland garden and is a great choice for the rock garden as well. It is even well-suited for hanging baskets and containers. The truth is that it may work throughout your landscape in many different situations.

Photo by Don Rawson



***Strawberry Begonia combines well with hostas and other woodlanders. Here it happily grows with Hosta 'Lonesome and Blue', one of Herb Benedict's rarest introductions. It is superb when planted in mass along streams, ponds or fountains. Strawberry Begonia looks great under trees and shrubs, too.***

As a diminutive companion, Strawberry Begonia can be aesthetically incorporated with your other shade plants – from hostas, ferns, Solomon's seals, mayapples, and shredded umbrella plants to bugbane, coleus, hellebores, heucheras, bleeding hearts, and columbines. But I particularly enjoy this showy little ground-hugger when planted in

mass under large hostas where it covers the otherwise barren ground. Not only does the silvery foliage nicely complement the color of the hostas (especially the blues), but it saves on the need to apply mulch each year. Plants like this form a kind of "living mulch" and eliminate the need to buy fresh mulch annually.

In short, I enthusiastically endorse the Strawberry Begonia and think it is vastly underused in the North American landscape. It takes just about any condition and yet it keeps on growing. It withstands the cold, snow, and ice without damage. It persists all year long, showing a burst of fresh growth as it blooms each spring. Furthermore, because it is a dependable, rapid grower, you will be able to share it with friends who are sure to want it. Give it a try!

Photo by Don Rawson



***Strawberry Begonia is an ideal, low-growing groundcover for use beneath large hostas, such as seen here with H. 'Great Expectations'.***



**Other Interesting Strawberry Begonia Facts:**

- No serious insect or disease problems.
- Propagate by seed, or detach the little individual babies (rosettes) from the mother.
- Strawberry Begonia is used as an ornamental worldwide. (You may find it at your local Walmart among the houseplants!) It can be planted indoors during any time of the year and will grow rapidly, allowing you to enjoy its beautiful foliage. With the right conditions, it may even bloom.
- The foliage is occasionally used fresh or cooked in Japanese cuisine.
- It was also used as an herbal remedy in classical Japan.
- Several cultivars with variations in leaf shape, size and color are available, including 'Cuscutiformis', 'Maroon Beauty', 'Nezu Jinja', and 'Tricolor'.



Photo from [petalsfromthepast.com](https://petalsfromthepast.com)



## Did you know?



You may now register five hostas each year without incurring any cost. That's right – it's free! This applies to hosta registrations which are received online from January 1st through November 30th. A fee of \$10 applies to each registration after the fifth in a calendar year.

## A Hosta Addict's Gift Guide

### ✓ Hosta Books

Hosta collectors love researching their plants. *Mark Zilis' Field Guide to Hostas* is the most current book on [hostas](#).

### ✓ Plant Markers

Hosta lovers are obsessive about properly labeling their plants. Kincaid plant markers are some of the best, [www.kincaidplantmarkers.com](http://www.kincaidplantmarkers.com).

### ✓ Garden Art

Whimsical garden art will add fun and personality to any hosta garden.

### ✓ Membership to the American Hosta Society

[Hostaholics](#) thrive in being among like-minded people who “get it.” Two beautiful printed *Hosta Journals*, one *Online Journal* per year, and an exclusive members-only plant are just a few of the perks. [www.hosta.org](http://www.hosta.org)

### ✓ Gift Certificate

If you are still not sure what to get the hosta addict in your life, a gift certificate to their favorite hosta nursery is always sure to delight!

*Courtesy of In The Country Garden and Gifts*



# *MHS Annual Treasurer's Report, August 2021 - August 2022*

*Compiled by Patty Creal, Treasurer*



<b>Balance in checking account as of 8/15/2022</b>	<b>\$16,036.78</b>
<b>Balance in savings account as of 6/15/2022 (Convention loan repaid August 2021)</b>	<b>\$20,796.85</b>
	<b>\$36,833.63</b>

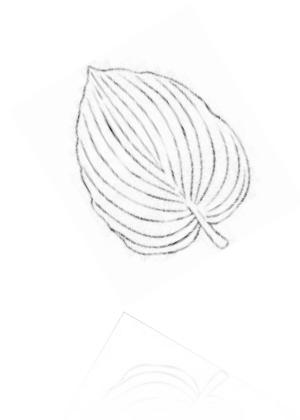
## **Fund balances**

Scholarship	\$6,990.50
Hillside	\$11,043.33
Benedict Tribute	\$134.96

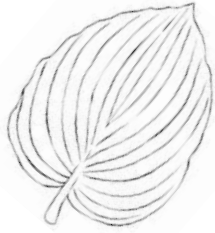
## **Deposits**

Membership dues - through May 15, 2022	\$635.00
Plant sale, May 2022	\$4,230.00
Work day, August 2021	
Auction	\$1,404.00
Lunch donations	\$153.00
Interest on checking	\$3.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6425.10</b>

<b>Expenses</b>	
Michigan Corporation fee for 2021	\$20.00
Liability Insurance Premium	\$395.00
Tecumseh Tent - balance for 2021	\$304.00
Tecumseh Tent - deposit for 2022	\$300.00
August work day 2021, lunch & donuts	\$251.30
Banner for Hillside	\$153.70
Donation - Memory of Bob Beraducci - Food Gatherers	\$100.00
Best seedling award for AHS convention	\$54.25
May 2022 Work Day lunch	\$136.98
May 2022 Plant Sale - \$2,800 plants, \$300.00 change	\$3100.00
Board expenses: checks, tax reporting	\$50.00
	<b>\$4,865.23</b>
Hillside expenses	
Printing of brochures for Hillside	\$127.30
Newsletter	
Copying and postage	\$126.50
	<b>Total expenses</b>
	<b>\$5,119.03</b>







## *Officers of MHS*

**President**

Ed Steinbrecher  
Kalamazoo, MI  
estein2210@aol.com

**Vice President**

Open

**Treasurer**

Patty Creal  
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**Secretary**

Lisa Quiggle  
Pinkney, MI  
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## *At-large Directors of MHS and Assignments*

**Awards and Recognition**

Open

**Membership**

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**Hosta Hillside**

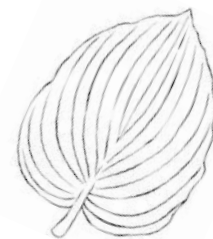
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**At-large**

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Saginaw, MI  
agavit53@att.net



## *Presidents of the three local Michigan chapters*

### **Eastern Michigan Hosta Society**

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### **Southwest Michigan Hosta Society**

Edwin Steinbrecher  
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### **West Michigan Hosta Society**

Don Rawson  
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Kay Anderson – Treas.  
West Olive MI  
kayhosta@gmail.com

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Jackson, MI  
lag10@comcast.net



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

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