

MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS



Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society

What has happened since our last issue of Hosta Happenings...

by Michael Greanya

On May 21st we held our annual spring get-together at Hosta Hillside. I want to thank everyone who braved inclement weather to safely arrive at Hidden Lake Garden. We worked on the Hillside until 10 am when thunderstorms arrived. During the 1-hour downpour, we all gathered in the administration building. One of our members risked life and limb to save the donuts and get them safely inside the building. After the rain subsided, we worked on the Hillside until it was time for lunch. After lunch we had a wonderful presentation by Don Rawson. Later, Don showed us how he digs and divides hosta using garden fork(s). I have to admit, I always used whatever shovel I had handy and dug the clump out. I believe that Don's method is very good and will cause little or no damage to the root system and crown. I plan on using his technique from



now on. We will try to encourage Don to write about his method in an upcoming newsletter.

June 18th we held our first ever hosta plant sale at Hidden Lake Garden. After the loss of our venue of several decades at the Soil and Science Building on the campus of MSU, we were fortunate enough to get an invitation from Hidden Lake Garden to join them. It

was a very good decision for us. The facility is conducive to our space needs and the traffic was significantly higher than at MSU's campus. We had 410 plants that were amazingly grown by Rosewinds Gardens (Osseo, MI). These plants were undeniably the best and most

diverse plants we have ever had. We look forward to returning to Hidden Lake Garden next year and continuing using Rosewinds Nursery's plants. All of our hostas were on sale for \$10/ pot and would have cost twice that amount in a retail nursery this year. Many hostas were not common in the trade and maybe not in your collection. If you

couldn't be at the plant sale this year, we hope you can make it next year.



Finally, the Great Lakes Region hosted its annual "Tailgate" in west Michigan June 24 - 26. Friday and Saturday were devoted to touring great hosta gardens in and around the Grand Rapids area and on Sunday gardens were open in the Kalamazoo area. Many thanks to West Michigan Hosta Society, Southwest Michigan Hosta Society, and their members for helping put on a great event. Thank you to those who opened their gardens so we could enjoy seeing some top-notch hosta gardens. It is a lot of work to prepare a garden for show and we appreciated the hard work you did to make this event spectacular. And special thanks to Don Rawson, Ed Steinbrecher, and Kay Anderson who did so much to make it all happen. Don hosted everyone at his spacious property where we all had time for conversation, a meal, and an auction that included many great plants. The highlight of the auction may have been when auctioneers did not sell H. 'Singing in the Rain' as the last plant auctioned. As Bob Sinke and numerous members warned, to do so would bring rain. And it did!

Join us on August 21st for our annual get-together at the Hillside. After we spruce up some of the garden beds, we will meet at the big tent in the parking lot for a lunch followed by a required short business meeting. We will then auction off some plants before we depart. If you can, please bring a plant or two to make our auction successful. We use the proceeds of these events to fund activities like this.

Enjoy the remaining summer months!



In a Moment it Was Gone...

by Sandy Wilkins

Editors Note: We asked Sandy to write about her feelings after a major storm plowed through her property, causing immense damage to her gardens. Having viewed the aftermath in person, the only thing I can think of that puts it in perspective is “total devastation.” What Sandy has shared here with us is only a portion of the article she wrote. You can look forward to hearing more about the state of her gardens in a future newsletter.



It was a typical summer morning, not unlike any other day in mid-August. This year, however, had been wetter than most, with frequent summer rains; a bit unusual for Michigan but not extraordinary.

I woke up early that cloudy day so I could walk through my neighborhood, as I often do, before it became too hot to stroll on the unshaded blacktop roads. “I don’t believe it is going to rain,” I thought as I sat at the kitchen table waiting for the dark clouds to clear while enjoying the view out my back window.

As I sat, I reflected on how blessed we had been to live on this woodland lot. Jim and I loved shade gardening together and over the years transformed this virgin woods into our own little Garden of Eden. We were both amazed how great the soil was, with lots of potential just under the dead oak leaves that wonderfully composted the soil below.

I began reminiscing about when I brought pieces of my Indiana landscape here, while Jim brought divisions from his garden in an old S-10 pickup truck. We combined our plants as we began a new life together in a new home. Prior to our meeting, each of us had previously been gardeners and we found we were even better gardeners working together. Truth is, Jim was the real gardener and had the science brain. He knew about bugs, diseases, electric fences, biomes, species, pH, hybridizing — the nuts and bolts. I was a bit more the aesthetic. I love the art of the garden, the flow of it, the ambiance, the mood, the peace and beauty, the symphony of the ever-flowing movements as the seasons change their tempo. Together we were better. This was our piece of heaven on earth and we never took it for granted.





Within a few years our gardens began to mature and were featured during many conventions and on many garden and nature tours. Our shade garden was written up in several magazines throughout the years, but the real joy for us was sharing our love of the Creator through the garden. We loved hosting weddings and sharing nature with others, especially friends and family. Many parties were held in our shady nook, back in a woodland corner lot of an otherwise sunny neighborhood. Love abounds in a garden. And in ours it surely did!



June 2, 2019 Jim left for an eternal garden where there are no weeds and an Eden that is perpetually perfect. It wasn't a shock exactly, but I was totally unprepared. Tragic for me, a gift for him. We celebrated his life that next weekend in our garden, a space he loved, with people he loved and that loved him. He would have liked that. There is an adage that when the gardener is gone, the garden is forever changed. That is true even if half a gardener remains. I was determined to not let our garden go to rack and ruin but to keep Jim's memory, his creation, his spirit alive in it.

July 24, 2021 I hosted a party, finally! The invitation just said a "Backyard Gathering," but really it was a birthday party for Jim. I was a nervous wreck! The day's weather forecast was for storms and the mosquitoes were thick because of all the precipitation we previously had. In spite of the threat of rain and hordes of mosquitoes, neither was a problem and everything turned out beautifully. The garden was filled with friends and family; everything looked green and lush; the summer breeze kept any remaining bugs away; the caterer was great; and, the chatter and warmth of those we love filled the space under the natural canopy, much like the old days once were. My heart was full, celebrating a life well lived in a garden well loved, with those that we treasured most - it was wonderful. That evening I began thinking about all of those people around the tables and walking and enjoying the garden paths. Their smiles and all of the stories they shared are still etched in my mind, but that day is the last time our garden would ever be enjoyed like that. "Our" garden would soon be gone, all of the landscape that was a part of my life was soon to be something very different.

On August 12, 2021... less than three weeks after the garden party, I sat watching the gentle rain turn into a really hard rain and then the trees started twisting and bending in the strong winds.



One of my favorite things about this house is the high windows so you can watch the elements outside yet feel safe inside. I was mesmerized by it this day. Jim would have had a fit that I was so thoughtless as to not go to the basement as I saw the storm increase, but I just didn't.

The sycamores outside my window didn't bounce right back, they moved in different directions and stayed there. And the huge oaks that filled the garden were acting strangely too. All of a sudden there

was a noise that I have never heard before. It was so loud, like a bomb with a crashing echo that surrounded and terrified me. All I could do was cry out in fear, "Father, what is happening, what is happening?" As my screams reached heaven, suddenly a wall of green blocked my view. The deck, the windows, everything in my sight was obscured by the tops of what had been shade trees moments before. I was dumbfounded, disoriented by the screaming wind and torrential rain, and I couldn't quite get my bearings. I slowly walked as if in a fog to the window near the front door to see what had happened. Through the rain I saw a large brown, sort of ball looking thing. I thought, "This must be a large squirrel nest that was blown down by the furious winds swirling around my home". I felt strange and was having a hard time putting the events of the last few minutes into some sort of reason. Soon the rain let up and became a drizzle. I opened the back door to step out onto the deck hoping to figure out what had just happened. But I was even more confounded because of all the branches, leaves, and disarray everywhere on the ground.



I opened the front door. I could see the driveway, although it was cluttered with branches and leaves and appeared impassable. The large squirrel's nest that I thought I had observed before was really the sandy root ball of a large oak tree that had fallen over and taken out several smaller trees with it. In fact, there were eight or more of those huge fallen mighty oaks with upended root balls just like this one, soil with hostas and other plants still attached but now growing horizontally; I just didn't know yet that this was just the tip of the iceberg. There was a giant oak that was not far from another fallen

oak that had partially fallen but got hung up in an adjacent tree, the grass layer pulled away from the anchoring soil beneath it and looking so precarious that I feared it would just tumble over at any minute. At last count I had lost 42 trees on our 5+ acre suburban lot of which over 3 acres are in gardens; there may have been more trees down.

As I walked down the steps and onto my newly installed concrete driveway, I felt I had stepped into another world, more like the Twilight Zone. I have no idea what it means to be shell shocked, but I think this might have been what it is like. I wandered down the driveway feeling like I was having an out-of-body experience. It was real, but it somehow wasn't. I have a new appreciation for people who have endured a tornado or hurricane, a house fire, a flood, or a sudden catastrophe. My loss wasn't on that kind of a scale, and yet it was nonetheless surreal



and my brain couldn't quite process it. The landscape appeared to be more like a combat zone than the yard of a suburban home it once was. Huge trees had fallen literally everywhere, and those that were not down had the tops twisted off and tossed aside everywhere. Many trees were split and shattered. The Garden House sometimes used for garden parties and Jim's Kubota tractor storage was covered with giant branches and I could see damage to the roof. Amazingly the main house and most of the statuary and garden art scattered throughout the gardens were for the most part unscathed. It was like divine intervention had spared them.

Everything in our gardens was gone in an instant. Our life, our garden, our refuge had forever changed. It was another loss that was so sudden and dramatic that it felt like losing Jim all over again. I was hanging onto this landscape, I needed it. Yes, I was modifying the garden, but I wanted it to be gradual and

sensible and not at all like this. In my tribulation of emotion, prior to the storm, I remembered how I had prayed and prayed about what to do with the garden, how to live here, how to keep Jim's memory and his hosta cultivars alive, yet how to manage the space. My dilemma was how

to move forward, yet cling to the past. In my heart, I knew God would answer, I just didn't know it would be so, well, decisive!



Hosta Breeding Program at Walters Gardens

(Continued from last newsletter)

By Hans Hansen

We asked Hans a few questions regarding his goals with his hybridizing program and how Walters Gardens names their new hostas. We also asked how they select certain cultivars for their Proven Winners introductions, and whether or not a plant will be patented. Finally, Hans tells us what types of hostas are best sellers at Walters.



H. 'Gigantosaurus'

What are your hybridizing goals?

Several breeding goals include: **distinction**; in this factor we are looking for hostas that are unique and stand out from the crowd. I'm partial to hostas that have ruffled margins, the more extreme the better. Early on in my breeding program I worked with blues to get varieties that hold their color throughout the season and have intense blue coloration. My current work concentrates on variegation.

From a nursery standpoint another one of our goals that we look for and value are hostas that are **dependable and reliable** in tissue culture; finish quickly in a liner; and finish quickly in a container for the retailer. If a hosta fails in one of those 3 categories on the nursery level, customers will not succeed.



We are also looking for hostas that **show their mature characteristics** early on. This is a great attribute. If a hosta has extreme puckering or wavy margins that aren't evident for several years from tissue culture, it makes the plant difficult to sell. Also, if the margin doesn't get the mature width until a few years later, it also can be problematic. We do sample tissue culture runs as the final evaluation step to study the potential hosta releases in nursery production.

These characteristics are also used to determine which plants receive the distinction of Proven Winners plants.



How are the hostas at Walters Gardens named?
I name the new hostas for Walters as well as the new cultivars of Epimediums and Mangaves. The rest of the product lines go through a committee. We post pictures via email internally within the company and then brainstorm those names. Names are voted on by a naming committee. We try to match the hostas personality with a name to reflect that.



What determines whether or not a hosta will be patented?

If the plant is from the Walters Garden Breeding and Introduction program and released into the nursery trade it is patented. If an independent hosta breeder works with us on a project, we will assist the hybridizer with the patent process as well.

What types of hostas are the best sellers at Walters?
We find the large hostas and the variegated hostas sell the best for us. The miniature and small varieties do not sell in the same volume as the larger size hostas.



The following are some of the plants from Hans' recent breeding program that have been named and registered. There are about 30 to date:

H. 'Above the Clouds', H. 'Age of Gold', H. 'Dancing in the Moonlight', H. 'Dancing with Dragons', H. 'Diamond Lake', H. 'Drop-dead Gorgeous', H. 'Gigantosaurus', H. 'Echo the Sun', H. 'Joy Ride', H. 'Love Story', H. 'Miss America', H. 'Mouseketeer', H. 'My Fair



Lady', H. 'Party Streamers', H. 'Royal Crest',
H. 'Seasons in the Sun', H. 'Silly String', H.
'Silver Bullet', H. 'Sound of Music', H. 'Tears
in Heaven', H. 'Terms of Endearment', H.
'Time in a Bottle', H. 'Trendsetter', H. 'Voices
in the Wind', H. 'Waterslide', H. 'When I
Dream', H. 'Wiggles and Squiggles', H. 'Wild
Imagination', H. 'Wind beneath My Wings'



Unusual Woodlanders for the Shade Garden: Cypripediums

By Michael Greanya

Cypripediums are an example of terrestrial (ground) orchids and are commonly called “Lady Slipper” orchids because they resemble a pair of slippers. Most Cypripediums bloom in late spring as the hostas are just beginning to unfurl. They make a stunning display in the foreground of a hosta bed with early emerging hostas just opening up in late May and early June.



There are many types of hardy terrestrial orchids that you might consider growing. They include Bletilla, bog orchids like *Dactylorhiza* hybrids, and *Calopogon tuberosus* (Grass Pink Orchid - a bog orchid), and of course Cypripediums, to name a few. I have

grown all of the above successfully for several decades here in Michigan. Availability of these terrestrial orchids may be found at specialized nurseries, but it is easier to buy them by mail order if you don't have a source nearby. We will focus on the Lady Slippers here.



Cypripediums are similar in appearance to some of the tropical orchids like *Paphiopedilum* and *Phragmipediums*, which I have grown extensively in the past. The major difference is that many Cypripediums are

winter hardy in our northern climate while tropical orchids are not. From experience, the tropical orchids just mentioned are often more difficult to grow and to bloom annually while *Cypripediums* are generally quite reliable spring bloomers.



Many people believe *Cypripediums* are difficult to grow. They are actually not that difficult if you give them what they want, just like any plant. They should be planted in a location where they will receive bright, dappled light throughout the morning and either shade or well-filtered afternoon sun. They generally will not tolerate full sun or even direct afternoon summer sun. An hour or 2 of very early direct sun is ok, but should be avoided after about 9 - 10 a.m. Even if they survive too much sun, direct sunlight can burn the leaves and flowers will last a few days instead of a few weeks. This shortened season is not good for the plant because it reduces its growing season.

One requirement you cannot ignore is their need for a well-drained, well-aerated soil. Tony Avent of Plant Delights says of their soil requirements, "some *Cypripedium(s)* prefer dry, sandy, acidic soils, while others prefer moist, neutral or alkaline soils. If there is a question about what conditions a *Cypripedium* needs, the default is a moist, well-drained, organically rich soil with a slightly acidic pH." Some of the other hardy terrestrial orchids I mentioned above have their own growing requirements, so research them before you buy to make sure you can provide what they require.

Cypripediums benefit from light feedings of a balanced fertilizer like 20-20-20 during their growing season only, but do well with other balanced ratios too. Avoid fertilizing after blooming. A rule I use is to water and fertilize "weakly weekly" during the active growing season. That just means to significantly dilute the mix of water to fertilizer. Don't spread granular fertilizer on your terrestrial orchids as this may give them much more than they need or want and could kill them.

Now that you know a little about *Cypripediums*, let's look at how you can be successful growing them outdoors in your garden. I know of several people who have grown *Cypripediums* in their existing garden soil successfully. To me, there are risks associated with planting them in the same garden soil that your hostas grow in when you could control all aspects of the soil by making your own. Drainage, pH and soil structure are of particular importance. There is a safer way to pot and plant *Cypripediums* that gives you the best chance of successfully growing them year after year.

Many years ago, I bought my first *Cypripedium* at Hosta College from Roger Zielinski of Raising Rarities. Roger has since sold his business to Plant Delights. Roger also taught a class on growing them where he showed us how he grows them outdoors that he touted as a "failproof" method. He was right. Roger's idea was to grow the Lady Slippers in pots (1-2 gallon size) that are sunk into the ground up to the rim of a pot and topped with leaf mold. Done this way, they have great drainage and what they need to thrive year after year. Make sure to improve drainage below the pot if necessary. If drainage is a problem, try putting several inches of gravel in the hole below the bottom of the pot first so water can drain from the potted plant. Do NOT remove the potted plants for indoor winter storage as *Cypripediums* need a winter dormancy. Divide the eyes in late September - October when they fill the pot.

Ester Benedict and her husband Robert own Benedict Nursery in Nappanee, Indiana. She has also taught classes at Hosta College in the past. Ester specializes in alpine and rock garden plants and has also propagated *Cypripediums* from seed, a difficult process to say the least. She uses a slightly different soil media than Roger's. Both soil recipes are

found below. Try one of the soil recipes and if you can't find one ingredient or another, improvise the best you can.



Tropical orchid
Paphiopedilum 'Macabre Flutter'



Cypripedium reginae



Cypripedium 'Philipp'

Roger's recipe and potting instructions:Materials

- One-gallon plastic pot or liner preferably black (I use a 2 gallon pot and doubled the recipe)
- 2 parts - Granite grit (Chicken "grower" size from the feed store)
- 6 parts - Perlite
- 2 parts - Potting soil or pro mix
- A scoop or a handful of ground oyster shell, from the feed store

1. Mix all the substrates together thoroughly and add water only to make it damp.
2. Plant the Cypripedium into the pot by holding the plant upright in the pot with the eye of the plant about 1 inch to ½ inch below the top rim of the pot and letting the gravelly mix fall around the roots until you fill it to the top. Now tap the bottom of the pot and the substrate should drop down another ½ inch or so. You can top off the rest with the extra substrate mix.
3. Now "plant the pot" so it is sunk into the ground, level with the earth.
4. Water the plant.
5. Now top off the pot in the ground, with 1 inch of ground up oak leaf mulch. I often mulch with shredded hardwood that is somewhat composted. Oak leaf mulch is good but any fine mulch will do. If the plant is in a windy area, you must make sure the leaf mulch won't blow away. You can do this by topping with coarser wood chips and/or pine needles on top of it. Don't let the mulches disappear because even though it is a perfect medium for Cypripediums, the gravelly mix will not insulate very well and the eyes could possibly freeze in the winter, or easily dry out in the summer.

Ester Benedict's Recipe:Materials

- 1 part sand
- 1 part Turface® (if you can't find at nursery, you can mail order it)
- 2 parts potting mix
- 4 parts perlite

Follow potting and planting method described on the left.

Some specialized nurseries mail order Cypripediums in the fall while others still ship in the spring. The key is to order early. They usually sell out for the year quickly. Cypripediums can be expensive. It usually takes the grower 5 or more years to grow them to flowering size, significantly longer than other perennials. But when they are in bloom, you will think this is the best plant investment you ever made!

Some sources for Cypripediums:

<https://www.plantdelights.com/collections/cypripedium>

<https://www.gardensatposthill.net/index.html>

<https://www.keepingitgreennursery.com/>

<https://hillsidenursery.biz/>







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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

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: _____

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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

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