

# MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS

Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society



## Autumn in the Shade Garden

by Hans Hansen

Historically, spring has always been my favorite season. Hailing from Minnesota, the winters were cold and long, and spring could never come soon enough. It seemed

winter began in November and continued into April. Things changed for me when I moved to western Michigan and experienced Lake effect life. Now autumn has become my favorite season and for many

reasons. The temperature seems to be more conducive to working in the garden, and the pace of working in the garden changes from warp speed in the spring and early summer to leisurely pattering in the fall. Autumn is



*All photos in this article provided by Hans Hansen.*

also less mentally stressful as one is not contemplating late spring frosts that damage hosta leaves, burn newly emerging Japanese maples, or ruin magnolia displays. Fall is a great time to plant shrubs and perennials, allowing the root system to establish before winter and the plants to be well established in the spring. It is my favorite time to move and divide hostas because it doesn't interfere with their

symmetry or cause one to have to look at the elongated floppy leaves and stretched petioles as is the case from late spring and summer division.

The most obvious reason fall is so enjoyable is the color provided by trees getting

ready to shed their leaves. The diversity and vivid intensity of fall color is a stark contrast from the grasslands of the Midwest prairie to the native mixed hardwood forest of the Michigan lakeshore. Our planted and edited

woody landscapes include native and exotic trees that exemplify the majestic autumn leaf display that lasts significantly longer than the brief floral display. Dramatic temperature swings accelerating the spring floral show or unkind late spring frosts that terminate the spring blossoms of woody plants are less problematic for fall color. Some of my favorite trees for fall display are Japanese maples, sugar maples, ginkgoes, and larches. It is hard to beat the intense fire-engine reds of the Japanese maples, the brilliant golds of the ginkgoes, and the lemon yellows of the larches before the leaves tumble to the ground. Stewartias, especially *Stewartias pseudocamelia*, turn butterscotch yellow and hold their leaves for a good amount of time. Few trees flower in the fall, but one that does stand out is the fall-blooming witch hazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*. Although the ribbon-like yellow flowers aren't splashy, they add interest when fresh new flowers are a fleeting memory. Seven Sons Flower or *Heptacodium miconioides* is another option for late fall interest. The opening of the panicles of white flowers coincides with the migration of monarch butterflies, and I enjoy seeing



Japanese maple



Stewartia



Heptacodium



both with the plant situated next to my deck. The interest is further enhanced by the calyxes that age to a dark pink color after the flowers fall and persist and mature to a dark burgundy. Both *Stewartia* and *Heptacodion* have fantastic bark that carries the interest throughout the winter and well into spring.

There are perennials and bulbs that flower in late September and into October that provide interest in the shade garden. We often think of chrysanthemums, asters, and goldenrods for sunny exposures but there are some really fantastic options for shade as well. *Cimicifuga simplex*, or Baneberry, is a great late blooming clumping perennial and is invaluable for adding height to the shade garden as most are in the 4-6' tall range. My favorite forms are those with dark burgundy foliage. C. 'Hillside Black Beauty', C. 'Chocoholic', and C. 'Brunette' are some that are available. Bottle brush-like plumes wave above the clumps in



September and have a strong fragrance reminiscent of wild plum blossoms. Light filtered shade in evenly moist soils that do not dry out suit them best.

*Aconitum carmichaelii*, or monkshood, have delphinium-like spikes of violet blue flowers in late September into October. Like the *cimicifuga*, their height makes them especially prominent with selections reaching 4-6' when well grown. The vividness of the violet-blue flowers can be enhanced when planted in front of trees and shrubs with golden fall color. They have tuber-like rootstocks that increase in number over time. In moist, well-drained

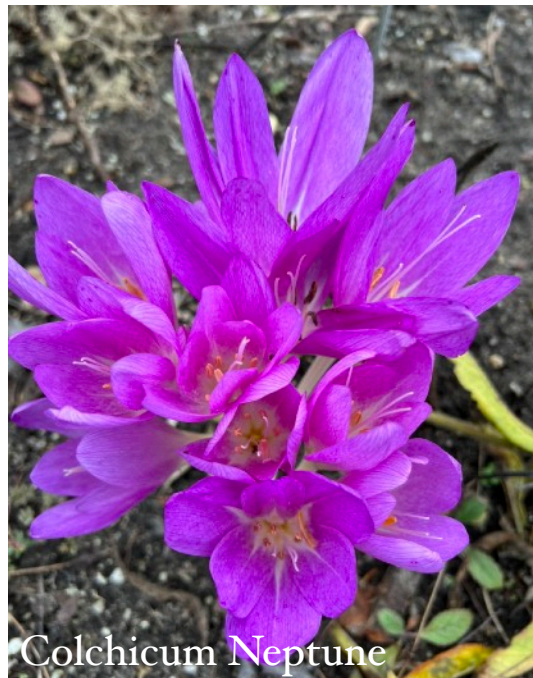


soils they can be grown in sun or shade – I prefer them in shade. This plant is poisonous, so care should be taken not to ingest it.

When fall Japanese anemones come into flower, few other plants, aside from chrysanthemums, can compete with the show. Best considered as ground-covers and used as such, they spread by underground runners over time to form a weed suppressing mass of dark green foliage. Anemone ‘Honorine Jobert’ introduced in 1858 has been cherished by gardeners for over 100 years. New selections come in pure white to dark rosy pink and everything in between. Single and double forms are available. My favorites are the ‘Fall in Love’



Cyclamen



Colchicum Neptune



Cyclamen

Anemone Series and the ‘Curtain Call’ Anemone Series. By selecting different cultivars, gardeners can have a series of different heights ranging from 18” to 4’.

*Tricyrtis*, or toad lilies, are charming additions to the hosta garden. They prefer the same moist shaded conditions as hostas and come into their own as the hostas are looking tired. They aren’t as showy or have as bold a texture as hostas but do offer late season flowers. Plant these along a path or the front of the border where they can be enjoyed up close. The dime to quarter size flowers, often heavily spotted, have an exotic look. Some species have arching foliage that can be used to cascade over rock walls and soften hardscape.

I have recently come to appreciate what fall blooming bulbs add to the garden. Among the showiest are the Colchicums. Sometimes referred to as autumn crocus, they have goblet-shaped flowers that appear in September and well into mid-October. This is a European,

Mediterranean, west Asian genus, and by careful selection of different species and hybrids, one can find a lot of diversity to add to both the sunny rock garden as well as the lightly shaded woodland garden. The foliage appears in the spring, goes summer dormant, and the fall flowers appear in clusters. Usually, the color range is in the magenta pinks and whites and since the flowers are “naked” without foliage, they pair well with perennials that have foliage. Some of the most memorable combinations I have seen over the years include the white *Colchicum album* paired with the black leaves of *Ophiopogon* ‘Niger’; the double white *Colchicum autumnalis* paired with *Carex* ‘Feather Falls’; and in my garden a nice trio comprised of *Colchicum* with *Heuchura* ‘Wildberry’ and the flower color of the *Colchicum* echoed in the hybrid *Phlox* ‘Opening Act Romance’. ‘Opening Act Romance’ flowers intermittently throughout the season after its intense early June display.

Another bulb that adds much to the shaded garden is *Cyclamen hederifolium*. These relatives of the florist cyclamen are perfectly hardy in Michigan. Originating from southern France and the Balkans through Italy, the small flowers begin in

early September before the foliage emerges and continue to flower into October. The foliage appears during flowering and seems to be immune to freezing temperatures as it persists throughout the winter. I plant dozens every year as the patterned leaves are like snowflakes with no two plants being alike. The flowers come in shades of pink



and white while the heart to arrow-shaped leaves are pewter and green with many different patterns. They will happily self-sow when the conditions are right. The pollinated seed pod will retract into the base of the plant by coiling like a tight spring with the finished product looking like the wire spring inside a ball point pen.

One of my most cherished plants is

*Galanthus* ‘Tilebarn Jamie’, which I received as a gift from Judith Tyler of hellebore fame. *G.* ‘Tilebarn Jamie’ is an early flowering form of *Galanthus reginae-orgae*, and every year like clockwork it is in flower for Halloween. The white teardrop shaped flowers are the same as the spring blooming types, but instead flower in the fall. Care must be taken to site these in the absolute front of the border so they will be appreciated when they flower as they are competing with the foliage of taller plants, unlike the spring forms that flower with the melting snow, when the garden is a blank

slate with no other plants or vegetation to distract the eye.

There are a few perennials whose fall color rivals that of any woody plant and two come to mind: the muckdenia and amsonia. *Muckdenia rossii*, an Asian relative of the strawberry begonia and heuchera, emerges in early spring

with sprays of tiny white flowers followed by fan-shaped glossy green leaves. The beautiful leaves stay attractive all summer and turn a bright red in early fall and the effect remains stunning for many weeks.

The cultivar 'Crimson Fans' has the most reliable fall color. A few years ago a botanist at the Gutenberg Botanical Garden in Sweden crossed *Oreithya* with *Muckdenia*, resulting in a much larger more vigorous plant with larger leaves – basically the 'Empress Wu' of the family. The hybrid called x *Oredenia* 'Fusion of Fire' also has a brilliant fall display.

The other fantastic perennial for fall color is *Amsonia hubrichtii*. This native American perennial has threadlike foliage that turns a

brilliant buttery yellow in October lighting up the garden. It is a long-lived clumping perennial like a peony and is graced by clusters of small soft blue starlike flowers in May. If *Amsonia hubrichtii* is too large for the garden, both A. 'String Theory' and A. 'Georgia Pancake' offer a similar effect on smaller plants. *Amsonia* 'Georgia Pancake' is

a ground-cover with needle-like foliage and can be used to soften paths, stonework and hardscapes, much like a creeping phlox.

Finally, don't forget to enjoy the Hostas themselves in the fall. *Hosta tardiflora* and some of its hybrids flower in September and into October. I enjoy the dark purple stems and lavender flowers that signal the end of the hosta season. Also, Pure Michigan autumns are great for enjoying the Hostas transition from their green and blue hues to yellows and golds as the plants transfer their

energy into their roots and prepare for the next growing season. Why get in a car to travel up north to enjoy the fall color when it is all around you.

(All photos in this article provided by Hans Hansen)



## *Unusual Woodlanders for the Shade Garden: Hellebore ‘Anna’s Red’ and ‘Penny’s Pink’*

*By Don Rawson*

If by chance you have never grown hellebores, you have overlooked one of the best woodland plants of all! Hellebores are easy to grow and are low maintenance. They look good from January or February to May or June. Even when their seed has set, their sepals are still attractive, eventually becoming green. Their foliage is bold and evergreen, and with some of the newer hybrids the marbled leaves are just as stunning as the flowers.

Hellebores thrive in rich, moisture-retentive soil but struggle in boggy, wet conditions. Most will tolerate full sun to almost full shade. They are perfect partners for early-flowering spring bulbs, pulmonarias and evergreen ferns, as well as hostas. The flowers range from gray, green, apricot, pink and red to the deepest black or pure white. They can be striped or spotted, picotee or plain, double or simply single.

Also known as Lenten roses, hellebores have many noteworthy qualities. First of all, they are great for bees. Since hellebores generally begin blooming in January or February, they provide some of the very first food of the year for bees. This is

critical to bee health and survival. Plus, when everything else is dormant or dead in winter, their blooms emerge and brighten even the darkest days.

Secondly, hellebores thrive in hard-to-grow areas: Because they prefer partial to full shade, hellebores are well suited for that part of your garden where nothing else seems to grow. They are hardy in USDA zones 4 to 9 and will do well in the ground as well as in containers. They tolerate morning sun, but need to be protected from the hot afternoon sun, so choose your planting site carefully.



Photo by Dan Myers. Used by permission.

**Hellebore ‘Penny’s Pink’ in the garden of  
Dan Myers, Grand Rapids, MI.**



Photo by De Stekkentuin. Used by permission.

**Named after Anna Pavord, a famous plantswoman and gardening author from the United Kingdom, ‘Anna’s Red’ is a sterile hybrid from crossing *H. lividus*, *H. niger*, and *H. x hybridus*, a task formerly thought impossible. The deep red, outward facing flowers and striking mottled foliage are equally stunning, making it one of the most sought-after hellebores on the market today.**

Another hallmark is that hellebores are relatively maintenance free. The blooms are cold tolerant, so you don’t need to run out to cover them during cold weather. As evergreens, they look great all year long. The leaves are present year round so you don’t need to worry that they’ll look unattractive at certain points of the year like other plants that die back (such as hostas!). They do not need to be pruned unless you want to remove the leaves that have dried out and died. They will perform better if

you fertilize them during the fall and spring, but it’s not required by any means.

Lastly, hellebores have very few pest issues. They are generally healthy and have minimal issues as long as they are protected from the sun. Aphids are known to attack them, but that’s about it. They are rarely damaged by deer browsing. No plants including hellebores are absolutely “deer-proof” because very hungry deer will eat just about anything if desperate enough. The thick, leathery leaves of hellebores, however, are fairly deer and rabbit resistant.

### ‘Anna’s Red’ and ‘Penny’s Pink’

There are hellebores, and then there are Rodney Davey’s hellebores. Two of this man’s creations — ‘Anna’s Red’ and ‘Penny’s Pink’ — are some of the most sought-after hellebores in the world today. Operating a small nursery near the village of Tytherleigh in the UK, Rodney has accomplished a task formerly thought impossible — the crossing of *Helleborus lividus*, *Helleborus niger*, and *Helleborus x hybridus*.

It took Rodney 12 years to achieve his goal of raising a red-flowered hellebore with marbled foliage. First of all, he had to create the mother plant, painstakingly transferring pollen from one hellebore to another in the hope that at least a few of the seedlings raised from the cross would carry the characteristics he was looking for. When finally he was satisfied with the mother he had created, he started on the next round of crosses, using the pollen from several different hellebores. For years he sowed the seeds that resulted from this second round of crosses, putting the best to the best, but in each batch of a thousand seedlings, he





Photos by Carolyn Walker of Carolyn's Shade Gardens. Used by permission.

**The remarkable hellebore 'Penny's Pink' offers an ever-changing color show. The evergreen leaves have pronounced veining that is fuchsia-toned in spring and then gold as the season progresses. Named after English plants-woman and author Penelope Hobhouse.**

rarely kept more than two to continue to grow.

Sometimes, only a few seeds would germinate. The dream hellebore that Rodney was pursuing seemed to be locked up inside seedcases with particularly hard helmets that refused to release the germ inside. Rodney tried to soften the seeds by spraying them with water, but they could not be persuaded to open. They were too delicate to cut or force open by hand. For many propagators this would have been impossibly frustrating, but Rodney likes a challenge.

Finally, after years of work, he began to recognize characteristics in some of his hard-fought-for seedlings that suggested he was on the right track. Even before young plants flowered, he guessed from the deep purple flush on their stems that their flowers were likely to be equally lustrous. After several more years of laborious work,

he finally selected the seedling that has become 'Anna's Red'. But to get enough plants to sell, it took several more years to build up a stock of two hundred plants in pots. The first plants eventually came to market in 2013 after tissue culture techniques were developed to micro-propagate them, another challenge that was overcome.

### **The Special Features of Rodney Davey's Hellebores**

Noted for its lovely marbled foliage and the beauty of its flowers, hellebore 'Anna's Red' has single, rounded, rich red blossoms with creamy white stamens. Opening from dark purple-red buds, these charming gems bloom heavily from late winter well into spring. Because the flowers are sterile, they last a long time.

The flowers are held on stately red stems above thick, leathery evergreen leaves that

are wonderfully marbled with conspicuous bright pink veins, which is why 'Anna's Red' is ideal for brightening up a shady garden!

Hellebore 'Penny's Pink', another of Rodney's creations, is equally stunning! The 3" cup-shaped flowers are a lovely rosy pink with a prominent cluster of yellow stamens. The backs of the flowers are as pretty as the front and deepen to a dark pink with age. But it is often the foliage that stops people in their tracks: the new leaves come out looking like pink fishnet stockings. By June, the pink marbling has turned to lime-green and the leaves become shiny, thick, and leathery, while the spent flowers still provide much interest.

Unlike many hellebores with nodding, downward-facing flowers, the blossoms of 'Anna's Red' and 'Penny's Pink' are distinctly outward-facing, which means that you do not need to reach down and lift them up to enjoy them. Why do most hellebores have nodding flowers? Well, since hellebores bloom in the cold, their heads bend over to protect themselves from the brisk winter weather. This characteristic is a frustrating feature from a design perspective. Their beautiful little heads always want to face down, even when we want them to face up and outward so that we can see them. Fortunately, that is the case with these two remarkable varieties.

Both 'Anna's Red' and 'Penny's Pink' reach about 15" in height. They certainly deserve a prominent spot in your garden. You should search them out. You will not regret it!



**Rodney Davey and Lynda Windsor operate a small nursery in Tytherleigh, UK. Rodney grows the plants. Lynda organizes the rest. What happens when you go away? "Oh, I don't go away," said Rodney, quickly, with a shocked look on his face. "Rodney can't go over the Devon border," explained Lynda. Rodney smiles quietly into his beard. "He'd get jet lag if he went a hundred miles from here." So he doesn't. He has no driving license. No passport. And no desire for either.**

# *Hosta Hillside at Hidden Lake Gardens: October 2024 update*

*By Michael Greanya & Ed Steinbrecher*

Hosta Hillside has experienced devastating deer damage over the past three to four years. Although deer have been present since the beginning of the Hillside gardens, we have recently seen uncharacteristic damage never before experienced. The size of the deer herd may have grown since COVID in 2020. Once deer find a food source they like, they will often come back nightly to feast on whatever food is easy and abundant for grazing until it is gone. Early attempts to deter them were not successful. Milorganite and other deterrents were somewhat effective initially, but deer eventually get used to them. Rain dilutes their effectiveness and they must be reapplied frequently.

The MHS Board, staff from Hidden Lake Gardens, and MHS members rescued plants and amended beds over the last year. We saved the most heavily damaged plants first. They are potted and stored in a nursery setting and are growing into healthy plants again. Right now, there are roughly 600 potted plants with about 300 varieties that are in recovery, and they are responding well.

To protect the Hillside, the MHS Board in coordination with Hidden Lake Garden's staff is installing 8-10' black deer netting around the perimeter of the Hillside. This fencing is scheduled for 2025 while plant rescue will continue through next year with

an eye toward amending the soil and replanting Hosta Hillside in 2026. Large gates will be installed on both ends of the road adjacent to the Hillside that can be closed nightly and opened again in the morning for traffic to drive through and enjoy our rejuvenated Hosta Hillside.

We are asking you to help by getting involved in this restoration project from its planning through implementation stage in the next couple of years. With your help, we will be working over the course of the next 6 months to plan how we will redesign, and replant the Hillside. It is likely that some of the existing beds will continue to have hostas with few if any companion plants. Other beds may have a variety of plants without any or few hostas. We will be identifying beds clogged with tree roots and developing a plan for various plants in those beds that can tolerate root competition.

Other ideas are being considered such as widening the paths for golf cart access and to eliminate paths with extreme slope. This would make the Hillside more accessible to those with mobility issues.

It's going to take the help of everyone to bring Hosta Hillside back and make it better than ever. Next spring there will be a need for help planting 1-gallon pots of hosta, labeling newly planted hostas, and many more tasks that will need attention, some that haven't even been identified yet. We also need help with the early planning and creation stage going on now.

Be a part of making Hosta Hillside a true gem again and volunteer to help us make it happen! Contact us at [mihostasociety@gmail.org](mailto:mihostasociety@gmail.org).

# Hosta College 2024

By Kevin Jackson,  
Northern Illinois Hosta Society

I was asked to write about the Hosta College I recently attended in Piqua, Ohio. First, I would commend them on having an event that wasn't outrageously expensive. I have passed on most of these types of events because they just aren't in my budget. They had an auction of items from attendees and members as a way of keeping their prices down. I wish all groups looked at these events as part of their mission and looked at it the way that Costco prices their hot dogs. They move heaven and earth to keep the price of a hot dog and a soft drink at \$1.50. They have had that price for 40 years because they pledged to do so to the customers, but enough of my dream world.

I went to the Hosta College because Mark Rekoske recommended it (I trust his advice) and it was in my budget. They did a lot of things

right at Hosta College. Communication was great, friendly, and understanding. They had very nice size bare root plants as an attendee gift. Mine has a couple of eyes and is already growing well.

The first night was a chance to visit the vendors and get to know the other people there. It was also a night for the auction of Rare and Unusual Hostas and Seedlings.

They went for good prices so I didn't see it as a bargain shopping experience, but the people chose the price they were willing to pay so I didn't see that as a problem. The vendors, with our own member Uniquely Hostas, were great and there were some great plants at reasonable prices. Bob Solberg from Green Hill Hostas was there as a vendor and presenter. There was also a great conifer vendor, as well as vendors for small perennials and garden art.

Scheduled for Saturday were over 50 courses and lectures. Each class name, time, and classroom was on the back of the badge that every attendee was given the



Photos by Michael Greanya



previous night at check-in. They also provided a map with the location of all classrooms. There were a wide variety of classes such as making cement garden items; companion plants; running a hosta business; using rocks in the garden, and using rainwater collection to name a few. There were so many classes that I was overwhelmed with the number of classes I was interested in and had several more that I wished I had had time to attend. I am of two minds on this problem: 1) I wish they could have recorded all the classes and made them available free, or in a package so that I could have seen more content that I was interested in; but 2) perhaps it keeps attendees “wanting more” so that they come back next year. Not sure of the right answer here.

The classes I attended were great. Devon Smith from Hostasmith was especially good. I took a class on “Hosta Business Beginners Guide” and another on “Rainwater Storage for the Garden”. I think I will be utilizing the information in both of these. There were MANY other courses that I could not take because there were scheduling conflicts. If you are curious, here were the courses offered: <https://hostacollege.org/2024-class-list/#FH>.

My only suggestion was that it would have been nice to buy a shirt or hat from the event. I think it would have been another moneymaker for them. I hope to go again next year. I guess that is my strongest endorsement!

*Save the date!*

Hosta College  
March 21 -22, 2025  
in  
Piqua, Ohio

As it becomes available, information will be posted on <https://hostacollege.org/>

For hotel reservations:  
Limited number of blocked rooms for Hosta College.  
For Hosta College rates, use the links or call and ask for the Hosta College rate. (You cannot use third party reservation companies to get the HC rate.)

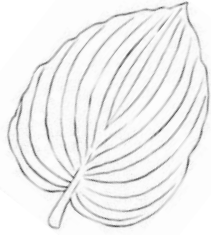
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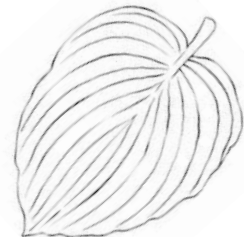
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## *Membership in the Michigan Hosta Society*

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: \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_

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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

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