

MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS

Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society



SAVE THE DATE!



**Sunday August 24, 2025
11:00 am**

Michigan Hosta Society Workshop
located at
Hidden Lake Gardens
6214 Monroe Rd., Tipton, MI 49287

We will demonstrate how to make a hypertufa pot and each person attending will make their own to take home! Wear your work clothes as this can be a messy hobby. The workshop will be in the barn rather than the Administration building.

Also, hostas that did not sell at the annual sale in June will be available to purchase for \$10 per pot! The list of available hosta will be online so you can order and pay for them when you register. The plants will be available for pick up during the event.

Registration includes

- Traverse City Pie Company box lunch
- Hosta 'Dragon's Dream' gift from Bob Solberg of [Greenhill Nursery](#)
- Presentation from speaker (TBD - likely from Gee Farms)
- Hands-on class making a hypertufa pot

You must register in advance of the date.

Registration begins August 1st at noon on the MHS website: www.mihostasociety.org

Members registration \$15; Non-Member registration \$25.

HANS HANSEN
Royal Horticultural Society
Chelsea Flower Show

By Don Rawson



Hans Hansen's Home Garden





Hans Hansen
Director of New Plant Development
Walters Gardens, Zeeland, MI

For many of us, Hans Hansen needs no introduction. Formerly working at Shady Oaks Nursery in Minnesota, Hans moved to Michigan in 2009 where he serves as the Director of New Plants at Walters Gardens. He took over the perennial plant breeding program, which is now recognized as a leader in the industry. Hansen has made dramatic improvement in many plant genera, including *Baptisia*, *Agastache*, *Clematis*, *Digiplexis*, *Helleborus*, *Heuchera*, *Heucherella*, *Hibiscus*, *Lagerstroemia*, *Mangave*, *Nepeta*, *Salvia*, *Sedum* and *Veronica*. Hans Hansen currently holds nearly 650 U.S. Plant Patents.

In 1997, Hansen introduced his first two hostas: ‘Pandora’s Box’ and ‘Fire and Ice’. Other well-known introductions include ‘Atlantis’, ‘Cathedral Windows’, ‘Dance with Me’, ‘Earth Angel’, ‘Journey’s End’, ‘Neptune’, ‘Old Glory’, and ‘Rainbow’s End’, to name but a few. Altogether, 111 Hansen hostas have been registered.

Hans Hansen was a winner at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in England this year with *Hosta* ‘Silly String’, which is no small achievement. You can see a short video of Hans’ award at the Chelsea flower show here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnqvfcndE4> Congratulations, Hans!



Chelsea Flower Show

By Libby Greanya

The Chelsea Flower Show, organized by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), is a garden show held for five days in May on the grounds of the Royal Hospital Chelsea in Chelsea, London. Held at Chelsea since 1912, the show is attended by members of the British royal family.

The flower show is attended by 157,000 visitors each year (a number limited by the capacity of the 11-acre grounds), and all tickets must be purchased in advance. From 2005 the show was increased from four days to five, with the first two days only open to RHS members. There are over 600,000 RHS members and the annual individual membership fee is about \$80.00 (US).

RHS Chelsea Flower Show is extensively covered on television by the BBC. Every night on TV there will be information on the Chelsea Flower Show... it is a very big deal in Britain and beyond.

Several members of the British royal family attend a preview of the show, as part of the royal patronage of the RHS.

The area of land devoted to show gardens increased steadily between 1970 and 2000, and the show has become an important venue for watching trends.

New plants are often launched at the show and the popularity of older varieties revived under the focus of the horticultural world.

The Chelsea Flower Show's 2025 Plant of the Year competition recognizes the most

innovative and striking new plants. *Hosta* 'Silly String' by Hans Hansen was named a runner-up, signifying its high standing among the entries. The hosta cultivar is characterized by its unique, narrow, blue, curly leaves with wavy margins, creating a striking visual effect.



Hans Hansen



H. 'Silly String'

AHS Launches New Hosta Registry Website

By Don Rawson

After months of work, the American Hosta Society has launched the new Hosta Registry website at www.hostaregistrar.org. The website is a radical improvement over the previous one, formerly called the Hosta Treasury.

Bright colors and easy-to-read print dominate the new website. The three links in the top toolbar — **Register a Hosta**, **Annual Registration Booklets**, and **Search the Database** — allow for easy navigation to the appropriate pages.




The new Hosta Registry website is a vast improvement over the old one, with bright colors and easy-to-read print. It is styled like the website of the American Hosta Society.

The entire process of building a new website began back in 2023 with a thorough review of the old website by a team of individuals. The previous website had been online since 2006, having an unappealing brown background with small font, which made it somewhat difficult to read. The main page was way too “busy” with much unnecessary information.




The old website was created nearly 20 years ago. While it served its purpose, it was time to update with a fresh, new look that corresponds with the website of the American Hosta Society. A big thanks to Registrar Gayle Hartley Alley for overseeing the entire process!

The process of registering a hosta is now much less intimidating, with a nice photo of Hosta Registrar Gayle Hartley Alley that greets users with her friendly smile. A link to the **Registration Guidelines** provides all the information you need to know, and **Register Online** allows one to complete a registration for a new hosta immediately. As soon as the required fields are filled in and submitted, the new registration can be viewed online instantly.



International Registrar Genus Hosta
Gayle Hartley Alley

Register Online



Registration Guidelines - Everything you need to know to Register your Hosta

Registration Guidelines

The friendly smile of Hosta Registrar Gayle Hartley Alley is very inviting, making the registration process more personal and less intimidating.

One convenient feature that was added to the new website is the ability to print each registration as a single-page pdf. So, the moment a new registration is submitted, it can be easily printed and filed for your own records. Furthermore, the pdf includes two new fields: the Section Class (which is used for Hosta Shows) and the Patent/PBR Number.

All in all, the new website is very inviting, stylish, and user-friendly. It complements the website of the American Hosta Society. A big “Thank you” to all those involved to make this a reality!



Simply by using the “Print” button, a pdf file allows any registration to be printed off as a one-page document. This is helpful for those who wish to print and file copies of those hostas they have registered.

Unusual Woodlanders for the Shade Garden: Solomon's Seal 'Byakko'

By Don Rawson

Few plants have a more interesting name origin than Solomon's Seal. It bears that title because the scars on the rhizomes are thought to resemble the marks of an old-fashioned wax Seal made by a ring. According to ancient legend, the plant is named after the biblical King Solomon who, after being granted great wisdom by the Hebrew God, had a special Seal that aided him in his magical workings. According to herbal lore, King Solomon himself placed his Seal upon this plant when he recognized



Photo by Sapphire Kate. Used by permission.

The rhizomes of Solomon's Seal bear rounded scars where the previous year's stems arose. These scars resemble the two inverted triangles of King Solomon's Seal. According to herbal lore, King Solomon himself placed his Seal upon this plant when he recognized its great value. Those with imagination can see the Seal on the rootstock in the circular scars left by the stem after it dies back.

In A.D. 130-200, the most famous physician of his day, Galen, recommended the use of Solomon's Seal root to remove freckles, spots, and marks for a fair and lovely complexion. In the sixteenth century, herbalist John Gerard claimed that Solomon's Seal was an effective treatment for cuts, wounds, and bruises of all kinds when used as a poultice. Furthermore, he claimed that when taken internally, the roots were excellent for "broken bones to knit." In 1640, renowned British apothecary John Parkinson noted that Italian women used the root to improve their complexions and retain their beauty and agelessness. In North America, early native tribes made a tea of the rootstock as a cure for women's complaints and general internal pains.

its great value. Those with imagination can see the Seal on the rootstock in the circular scars left by the stem after it dies back. Each year the stem leaves a scar or “Seal” on the rhizome. The plant’s age can be estimated by examining the rhizome.

The scientific name *Polygonatum odoratum* is equally intriguing. The term is a combination of two Greek words — *poly* meaning “many” and *gonu* meaning “knee joint,” in reference to the jointed rhizomes. Early herbalists believed that plants with jointed rhizomes were helpful in treating human joint disorders. The specific epithet *odoratum* comes from the Latin, meaning sweet smelling in reference to the delightful fragrance of the plant’s flowers.

Solomon’s Seal is a close relative of Lily of the Valley and was formerly assigned to the same genus (*Convallaria*, now *Liliaceae*), with several species native to shaded slopes and woodland areas of North America, Europe, and Siberia, and it is cultivated as a popular garden ornamental.

Noteworthy Characteristics

Solomon’s Seal is a rhizomatous, shade-loving perennial that typically grows to 18-24” tall on gracefully arching, unbranched stems. Each stem rises singly from a rhizome clad with 8-17 alternate, parallel-veined, oblong leaves that turn an attractive yellow in fall. Greenish-white tubular flowers (to 7/8” long) dangle from the leaf axils beneath the arching stems. The flowers have a sweet, lily-like fragrance, blooming from late spring to early summer, followed by blue-black berries in fall that hang downward from the leaf axils. It is hardy in zones 4 to 9.

Exceedingly unique is the Japanese selection ‘Byakko’, the name translating to “White

Tiger.” The leaves open up green, but then the portion closer to the red stem turns white within the following weeks. For best coloring ‘Byakko’ should be grown in light to half shade and it may take a couple of years for variegation to show up. As the story goes, according to Barry Yinger, ‘Byakko’ used to be a popular cut flower in Japan back in the day, but it became almost extinct.



Photo by Rick Goodenough. Used by permission.

We have plantsman Barry Yinger to thank for bringing this nearly extinct Japanese, cut-foilage cultivar into U.S. cultivation. The translation of ‘Byakko’ to “White Tiger” describes the amazing foliage. The red stems are adorned with leaves that emerge solid green and then the half closest to the stem gradually transitions to creamy white. ‘Byakko’ is truly a magical plant for the woodland garden.

Culture

Solomon’s Seal is easily grown in moist, organically rich, well-drained soil in part shade. Its best performance is in cool, dappled shade areas and it dislikes hot summer conditions. A

dependable grower, Solomon's Seal slowly spreads by shallow rhizomes to form colonies in optimum conditions.

'Byakko', in particular, is reasonably vigorous, considering the large amount of white on the leaves. Expect a 20" tall × 2' wide clump in five years. Do not be alarmed when these plants first emerge in the spring and the leaves are all green. The white markings begin to show as the stems harden. It develops the best variegation in dappled sunlight or half-day morning sun.

The white area is unusual because it actually increases in size as the season progresses. The variegation is of the plastid type — the result of mutated cells that do not make chlorophyll. The white areas enlarge as the plant shuts down



Photo by Soules Garden. Used by permission.

'Byakko' is reasonably vigorous, considering the large amount of white on the leaves.

chlorophyll production in the adjacent green cells. It is dependably hardy in zones 4-9.

Uses

It is best in woodland gardens or shady areas of rock gardens, or at the front of the border. It combines well with other woodland plants. The foliage is attractive in flower arrangements.

Problems

No serious insect or disease problems. Watch for slugs, snails, weevils, and sawflies. The gray caterpillar-like larval stage of Solomon's Seal sawfly can defoliate *Polygonatum* species and hybrids in early summer. Check plants regularly from late May onwards for the presence of larvae to prevent a damaging population from developing; remove by hand, if practical. Leaf spot and rust infrequently appear. All parts of this plant may cause discomfort if ingested by humans.

Availability

Polygonatum odoratum 'Byakko' was once widely grown in Japan for the cut flower industry, but it dwindled almost to extinction before being rescued. It is now slowly staging a comeback in the nursery trade. 'Byakko' can sometimes be found in the nursery trade sold under the name "White Tiger."

Dancing Oaks Nursery
Edelweiss Perennials
Fraser's Thimble Farms
Gardens at Mill Fleurs
Mason Hollow Nursery
Plant Delights
Soules Garden



Photo by Don Rawson

Solomon's Seal 'Byakko' makes a beautiful addition to the shade garden, blending nicely with ferns, hostas and other companions.



Polygonatum 'Ruby Slippers'

Hans Hansen

Summer in the Shade Garden

By Hans Hansen

Summer in the shade garden can be a wonderful experience. There are many advantages to having a woodland or shade garden compared to sun gardening. Shade provided by the high canopy of trees will be cooler, and because the sunshine is filtered, shade creates a more comfortable environment for the gardener out of direct sun. Usually there are fewer weeds growing in the shade because the weeds generally are less aggressive, grow slower, and many shade plants form a basal canopy of foliage that shields the ground from light that encourage weed growth. Shaded soil



also stays moist longer than soil in full sunlight, and unless the shade is provided by aggressive surface rooted trees, other plants will need to be irrigated less often than gardens in sun. Less

weeds, watering, and deadheading translates into less maintenance and more time to relax and enjoy the plants. One disadvantage to shade gardens is they often have fewer flowering perennials than their sunny counterparts, which can be

turned into a positive opportunity and create a peaceful and relaxing environment with foliage.

Without question the backbone of the shade garden is hostas. With their ease of culture and low maintenance, variety of leaf shapes and colors, and ability to thrive in lower light conditions it is easy to see why. Their bold, tropical feel are unrivaled in the hardy plant world. Hostas

may be used as specimens, groundcovers, or used in drifts in the border. Many hosta aficionados devote the entire landscape to them, collecting as many as space and budget allows. If popularity among gardeners is reflected in terms of volume grown in the nursery, the giant and large hostas seem to be the most represented in the landscape. Perennial staples like ‘Blue Angel’, ‘Empress Wu’, ‘Diamond Lake’, ‘Sum and Substance’, ‘Coast to Coast’, ‘Wu La La’, and more recently, ‘Miss America’ top the charts for volume sold. By using hostas as specimens in the garden and pairing them with companion plants with complimenting foliage, hostas can showcase and feature them in an even more prominent way. Here are some of my favorite perennials to combine with hostas.

Like peanut butter and jelly, ice cream and apple pie, ferns make the ideal friend for hostas. Most ferns prefer the same conditions as hostas, and their delicate and lace-like appearance balance the bold architectural form of the hosta. Ferns can be used to “tone down” the variegation of hosta leaves or color echo red stems. Because of their light texture they are best used in drifts among hostas. In my Michigan zone 6 garden I have enjoyed the following for many years:

Adiantum pedatum, commonly known as the northern maidenhair fern, with its black stems and hand-like foliage is a fern that always brings me joy during my woodland hikes. Preferring moist, well-



drained soils, over time they can slowly form impressive colonies of 1.5-2 feet tall and 2-3 feet wide. For northern gardeners this is among the best of the best. The species name “*pedatum*” refers to bird foot and one can draw the connection when studying the morphology of the frond. There are closely related species from the west coast of North America called *Adiantum aleuticum* that has slightly narrower fronds, and an extremely choice dwarf subspecies called *Adiantum aleuticum* ‘Subpumilum’ that has a grace and charm all its own. ‘Subpumilum’ is perfect for trough gardens. It coexists with dwarf hostas, or if the budget and time allow, an enviable groundcover. I think this is my favorite fern. I remember the first time I ran across this fern in a private hosta garden in

*Polystichum tripterum**Athyrium victoriae*

Minneapolis. It has good hardiness outside of its native range and reportedly it grows to 6 inches tall, but mine have always been more compact. *Adiantum venustum*, the Himalayan maidenhair fern, is a choice groundcover. It is extremely adaptable for cold climates. I have seen the Himalayan maidenhair thriving in Don Dean’s Zone 3 Anoka, Minnesota garden, as well as at Plant Delights Nursery in Zone 7b. Tiny lace-like leaves comprise small fronds that form a dense weed resistant barrier in the front of the garden. *Adiantum venustum* is another “must have” fern that looks its best along paths and in front of hostas in moist shade. The final species of *Adiantum* I am growing is *Adiantum capillus-veneris*. This is the southern maidenhair fern and resembles a larger form of *Adiantum*

venustum. Usually listed as hardy to USDA Zone 7, I would be curious to know if other northern gardeners have had success with it. It has thrived and colonized in the 4 years I have raised it here in Zone 6B, although I am in sandy well-drained soil with winter snow cover.

Polystichum tripterum, a seldom encountered semi-evergreen fern forms an upright mound-shaped clump of lovely dark green fronds. The three-pronged fronds look

like a capital T with the pinnae being longer than the one on each side. My 25-year-old clump was one of the few plants moved from my former Minnesota garden and is among the choicest plants in my yard. Its 1.5-foot tall by 1.5-foot wide clump is a great compliment to hostas.

My other favorite fern genera are the *Athyriums*, both the lady ferns as well as the Japanese painted ferns. *Athyrium filix-femina*, the lady fern, has a broad distribution and is native to North America, Europe, and Asia. As one would expect being widespread, it is one of the most durable ferns tolerating more extremes

than other ferns. The lady fern is adaptable to moist or drier soils, light to deep shade, many soil types and is a great companion for hostas. Strictly a clumping species, *Athyrium filix-femina* fronds are generally in the 1.5-2 feet range but can be larger under ideal conditions. *Athyrium* 'Lady in Red' has dark

burgundy-red stems and is an especially nice form. During the fern craze of the Victorian era, fern aficionados combed the woods for crested and unusual forms of them. Two cultivars from that era are still grown today, *A. 'Victoriae'* and *A.*

'Frizelliae'. *A. 'Victoriae'* forms an upright vase-shaped clump of narrow green fronds with the marginal fronds crossing back on itself forming a 3D effect. *A. 'Frizelliae'*, also called the tatting fern, has its fronds surrounded by round button-shaped leaves that are reminiscent of the lace my grandma used to make with her tatting shuttle and used around women's collars. Both make choice specimens of non-running clumps that are best showcased in a raised bed or along a path where the detail can be appreciated.

Last but not least of my favorite ferns are the Japanese painted fern *Athyrium niponicum* and



its selections. The Asian fern most often encountered is *Athyrium niponicum* var. *pictum* which is coveted for its silver fronds with dark burgundy stems. Under optimal conditions in soils that never dry out, the spores may germinate in the garden, especially along the foundation of the north side of a home or in mossy areas of the lawn. I have been blessed in my former garden to have large drifts show up on their own and colonize the garden. The cultivar *A.* 'Crested Surf', a vegetative selection and has the typical silver and burgundy coloration. In addition, *A.* 'Crested Surf' has smaller fronds along its margins and a tassel on its tip. There are hybrid ferns such as crosses between the lady fern and Japanese painted fern, *Athyrium* 'Ghost' being one of them. It is what one would expect as a perfect intermediate of both parents, with upright silvery vigorous foliage great for the garden.

Selaginella uncinata, also called peacock moss, makes a soft textured carpet of fern-like

foliage. This very shallowly rooted groundcover is perfect along a path or in front of hostas where one can stop and admire the detail. When the light hits it just right you can see the same turquoise and green colors that you would see in



Athyrium 'Ghost'

a peacock. This Asian groundcover should be hardy to at least Zone 6, as I've grown it in Michigan for over 10 years. Like its closely related ally, the ferns, peacock moss doesn't flower. Visitors always ask what it is when they see it in my garden and instinctively bend down to get a closer look and feel the foliage with their hands.

Astilbe 'Dark Side of the Moon' and *A.* 'Amber Moon' are

two cultivars of a perennial typically grown for their floral effect. *Astilbe* 'Dark Side of the Moon' has dark burgundy, compound foliage that can be used in drifts to contrast with the yellow foliage of hostas or *Carex*, also known as sedges. *A.* 'Amber Moon' has foliage on the opposite end of the color spectrum and is best used to contrast against blue hostas. The gold foliage of *A.* 'Amber Moon' will burn in too much sunlight, so the shade garden with the

*Selaginella*

hostas suits it best. Both flower in early summer with lavender flowers, but the floral effect is secondary to the interest provided by the foliage.

Syneilesis, or the shredded umbrella plant, is a fantastic shade plant. This Asian native is very adaptable and is hardy from at least Zone 4 to 7. Until recently the most commonly encountered form was *Syneilesis aconitifolia*, with extremely dissected foliage, and less often *Syneilesis palmata*. Within the last several years specialty nurseries have begun offering more selections

*Astilbe* 'Dark Side of the Moon'

including *Syneilesis taiwanensis* and the hybrid between *aconitifolia* and *palmata*, which is *Syneilesis* 'Tilt a Whirl'. Japanese collectors have developed strains and selections with variegation and cresting and if one keeps a keen eye out, they are often available from seed exchanges. My favorite is *Syneilesis* 'Hovov',

with clumps of crested dissected and serrated foliage. In spring they emerge from the ground looking like hairy aliens or sea anemones before the umbrella-like leaves unfurl. *Syneilesis* is propagated commercially by seed

*Syneilesis palmata* 'Hovov'

or division, neither being a “get-rich-quick scheme”, so you won’t find these at the box stores or mega garden outlets, making them even more choice. In general, shredded umbrella plants do flower, but the floral show is anticlimactic at best and two different clones are needed for good seed set.

The grass-like leaves of *Carex* can be another textural contrast to hostas. Ranging in width from hairlike to having a width broader than *Hosta* ‘Silly String’, some species are stoloniferous groundcovers while others form well behaved

solitary clumps. I love our native *Carex plantaginifolia*, with its evergreen foliage and broad leaves, but the hairlike growth of *Carex eburnea* and its size make it suitable for trough

gardens and use alongside dwarf hostas. Clump forming *Carex* are especially suitable along curving paths and used in repetition to draw the

eye along the walkway. Several very interesting new varieties have been bred recently such as *Carex* ‘Everillo’, *C.* ‘Feather Falls’, and *C.* ‘Moon Falls’. *Carex* ‘Everillo’, developed by sedge expert Pat Fitzgerald from Ireland, forms an evergreen (ever-yellow) clump of gold leaves perfectly paired with blue hostas. *Carex* ‘Feather Falls’ from New Zealand is a complex 3 species hybrid that has unbelievable

vigor. Its semi-evergreen dark green leaves with a white margin comprise a clump up to 2 feet tall and 3 feet wide. It is best cut back in



Michigan after a cold winter. I've also seen it showcased to perfection when grown in a large container or urn placed on a pedestal in the



shaded garden and allowed the leaves to cascade downward. *Carex* 'Moon Falls' is a very new release with white leaves and a green margin. I have just planted some in my garden so I have to reserve judgement, but if it is anything like *C.* 'Feather Falls' it will be a winner.

Ophiopogon 'Niger' is another grass-like perennial with persistent foliage. Near-black linear leaves are ever present and can be used to set off gold leaf perennials. I have seen many planted in front of gold hostas, chartreuse heucheras, or yellow flowered *Epimedium*. I have also seen it paired well with bulbs that do well in shade, especially *Colchicum* and

Cyclamen, which flower without foliage and look more natural interplanted between the vegetation of other plants.



Hakonechloa is mentioned in just about every article I read or write on shade gardening. Commonly called Japanese forest grass, this deciduous grass native to moist rocky woods in central Japan forms mounds of cascading fountains of foliage. Japanese forest grass is typically well behaved. It's been mentioned as "agonizingly slow" to reach maturity and it is another top 5 of my favorite shade plants. The solid green form, *Hakonechloa macra* is great for toning down the variegation of hostas and other flashy foliage plants. Until recently, the holy grail of *Hakonechoa* was *H.* 'Aureola,' with bright yellow leaves and narrow green

bands running down the leaves. Like gold leaf hostas, the yellow coloration does lighten up in summer in higher light conditions. Because of the reduced amount of chlorophyll, it is slower to grow than other Japanese forest grass. *Hakenochoa* 'All Gold' has become my favorite of the three. It has solid yellow leaves with a slightly more upright growth habit. Unlike *H.* 'Aureola' there are no green bands in the foliage, and surprisingly it has a fairly vigorous growth rate and is faster than aureola. It is great for brightening up dark areas of the shade garden or pairing with solid green or blue hostas. It is best grown in evenly moist soils that drain well.

Lobelia cardinalis, commonly called cardinal flower, and its hybrids provide much needed linear contrast in the shade garden. Modern selections combine dark, near-black foliage with red or strong pink flowers. The native cardinal flower is amazing, but my favorite are the Starship series. Seed strains developed by Kieft Seed are exceptionally consistent and have dark leaves. They are also compact and under three feet tall. It has incredible basal proliferation resulting in full compact plants with strong stems. *Lobelia* 'Starship Scarlet Bronze Leaf' is

my favorite with their red flowers and dark burgundy foliage, and it is especially showy in the shade garden. Other colors in the series are Starship blue, burgundy, deep rose, and rose, with dark green to olive green leaves. They prefer a moist soil, and tolerate some shade but

actually prefer full sun if it is available.

Lilium, or the true bulb lilies, are generally thought of as full sun plants, and the Asiatic and Trumpet forms are best grown in sun. Without near full sun, the number of flowers decrease

and the stems get weak and leggy. However, there are a number of species lilies and types that do very well in filtered shade. My favorites are the martagon lilies. In Minnesota, where I had all the space I would need in my shaded garden, I went down a rabbit hole and collected every *Lilium* I could find and hybridized them as well. Their value lies in providing a vertical aspect to counter the horizontal and mounding forms of most of the other shade plants. Martagon lilies, a hybrid group, are comprised of *Lilium martagon*, *Lilium hansonii*, and *L. tsingtauense*, and northern European and Asian varieties. They have great cold tolerance, actually thriving and performing better in Zone 3 than Zone 7 and warmer. They are often in the



Lobelia 'Starship Bronze'

Spigelia 'Little Redhead'

3-5 feet tall range, have strong stems that do not need to be staked and have leaves in whorls along the stem. The turks cap-like flowers with recurved petals resemble a hat worn historically by Turkish people and they open in succession

property that is now Walters Gardens before the land was tiled and became a nursery. Since moving to Michigan, I often spend the 4th of July weekend looking for colonies growing nearby. They often grow in very wet areas with



in late June and early July almost looking like butterflies hovering above the hostas. Unlike Asiatic lilies, these are slow to multiply and can be allowed to grow almost indefinitely without being divided. Uncommon but worth searching out from specialty lily growers, *L.* 'Claude Shride' is a great vigorous color. *L.* 'Moonyeen' is a wonderful soft pink color.

Another favorite shade lily is *Lilium michiganense*. As one would expect, this lily is native to Michigan and probably grew on the



cattails and *Hibiscus moscheutos*. I have also seen many colonies along creeks and rivers running through woodlands. Locally it has been common in Amon Woods near Grand Rapids, Michigan before deer browse affected the numbers of flowering-sized bulbs. If lilies are your thing, many of the west coast species are also candidates for shade and most likely available only as seeds from a seed exchange.



Polygonatum 'Angel Wing'

Polygonatum, or Solomon's Seal, is a close relative of the lily that also works well in shade. *Polygonatum biflorum* var. *commutatum* is our native species that is often encountered during woodland hikes. I was introduced to this species in Minnesota where an elderly neighbor

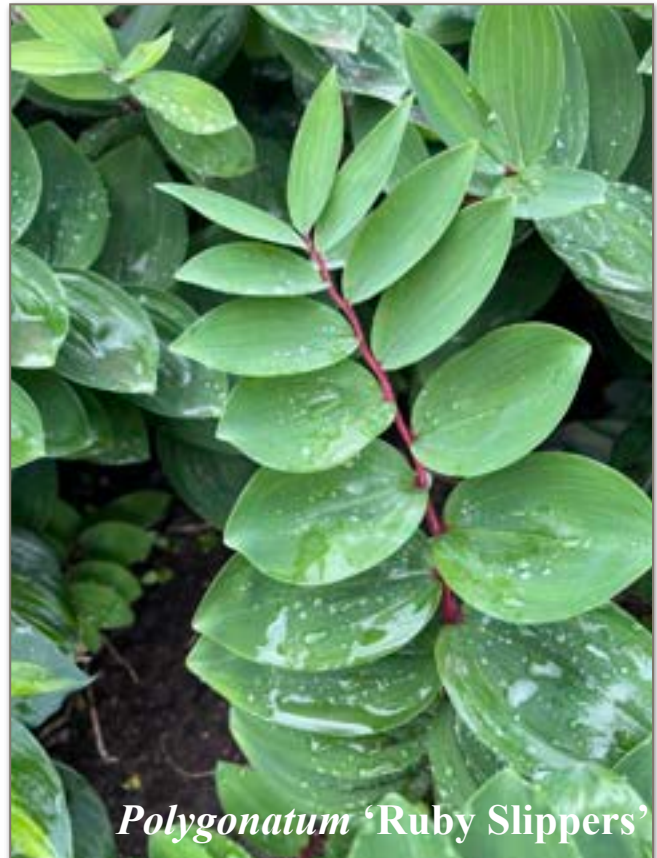
showed me a clump of it and said it was native in the area. In fact, she dug and transplanted it from a wooded property. Solomon's Seal are foliage plants with tropical looking leaves. Tiny pendant bell-shaped flowers are creamy white and hang from underneath the leaves and may



Polygonatum 'Byakko'

go unnoticed unless one is looking for them. If pollinated they will form blueberry-like fruit containing many seeds. Like the true lilies these plants can add height and a textural contrast to hostas. After college, when I began shade gardening Solomon's Seal, they were one of the first companion plants I added with hostas and I planted them so they circled tree trunks in the woods. Shortly thereafter I added *Polygonatum odoratum* var. *variegatum* with the creamy white-margined Japanese Solomon's Seal. More compact and refined than our native woodland species, *Polygonatum* 'Variegatum' also has attractive red stems and crisp white margins. A front cover subject for many garden articles and high-end garden designs, it adds a distinguished air of sophistication to the foliage textures. If narrow variegation is good, wide variegation is better and recently there have been a few wider margined forms of *P. odoratum* 'Variegatum'. *P. odoratum* 'Angel Wings' ('Carlisle') forms a slightly smaller clump that is slower to colonize because of its diminished amount of chlorophyll. The red stems compliment the architectural foliar display. *Polygonatum* 'Double Stuff' and *P. 'Doublewide'* are similar and all are great. *Polygonatum* 'Ruby Slippers' has dark green foliage with solid red stems. It has great vigor and is another standout to add vertical heights to the garden. One of the loveliest of all the *Polygonatum*s is the Japanese cultivar called 'Byakko'. This old Japanese cultivar, with its name translated to *P. 'White Tiger'*, was once cultivated in Japan for the cut-flower trade. It was introduced to American horticulture by Barry Yinger. *P. 'Byakko'* emerges in spring with the new growth having

incredible leaves that are white with green tips and, like many *odoratum* forms, it also has a beautiful dark red stem. *Polygonatum* 'Byakko' has great garden vigor and is one of my favorite plants.



Polygonatum 'Ruby Slippers'

Spigelia has a new found popularity due in part to the availability of nursery-propagated starter material. Native to woodlands in eastern North America it has made the transition from wildflower to garden perennial. Bright, cheerful tubular red flowers are clustered at the terminal ends of the stems. Here in Michigan, they begin flowering the end of May, bloom profusely for 6-8 weeks, and then sporadically until fall. Even though it is thought of as a woodland plant, it does equally as well in full sun — or perhaps even better — as it is more floriferous and reaches maturity sooner. It is planted by the acre

*Heucherella 'Copper King'*

in full sun fields at Walters Gardens for the wholesale trade. The cultivar *Spigelia* 'Little Redhead' is a clonal selection that is vegetatively propagated. *Spigelia* 'Ragin Cajun' is a spectacular selection discovered in Louisiana by plantsman Tony Avent. Flowers are on the orange side of red, and more floriferous than the species. I've heard legends of pink, coral, and white flowered forms of

*Heuchera 'Lemon Love'*

Spigelia marilandica showing up in native populations but nothing so far has been introduced into the trade.

I would be remiss not to mention *Heuchera* and *Brunnera* for the shade garden. Both have mound-shaped clumps similar to hosta, and *Brunnera* could be used in place of hosta in areas with high deer or rabbit browse. Mostly the frosted silver forms are



used in shaded landscapes nowadays rather than the solid green species *Brunnera macrophylla*. Commonly called perennial forget-me-nots, the clumps are covered in sprays of tiny light blue flowers in May for several weeks, then the large heart shaped foliage expands and forms deer and rabbit resistant clumps of foliage. Requiring well drained woodland soils, *Brunnera* are more drought resistant than hostas. They are great for northern gardens thriving in Zones 3-8. Over 20 years ago *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost' entered the horticultural world and took the genus from a botanical garden plant to the forefront of the shade garden. It forms a clump 1-1.5 feet tall and wide. Now larger forms with more silver overlay have been developed. Some of my favorites include, *B.* 'Jack of Diamonds', *B.* 'Queen of Hearts', and *B.* 'Sterling Silver'. *Brunnera* 'Jack of Diamonds' has huge



10-inch leaves that have a heavy silver overlay and prominent dark green veins and margin. The base of the leaf overlaps in a circular pattern like an escargot. It's companion in the series *B.* 'Queen of Hearts' has more of a heart shaped leaf that is silver with a faint network of green veins. Both form majestic clumps to 3 feet when well grown in good conditions. *Brunnera* 'Sterling Silver' has a slightly smaller leaf and growth habit; it is a vast improvement over the older cultivar *B.* 'Looking Glass'.

Heuchera, or coral bells, are another flowering foliage plant that has been revolutionized in my gardening lifetime. As a child I was familiar with the green foliated coral bell *Heuchera sanguinea* planted in the front of sun gardens for the coral-red hummingbird attracting flowers. In the early 1990s *Heuchera* 'Palace

Purple' with its dark bronze foliage entered the market and soon became widely available. Now there are nearly as many varieties and selections as one has time to plant, although you can't go wrong with the *Heuchera* cultivars like *H.* 'Caramel' or *H.* 'Lemon Love' for pairing with blue hostas for a great combination.

The middle layer of the shade garden can be the most challenging level to develop; however, it is one of the most important. Without it you have the bottom layer of the shade garden carpeted with plant material and then the trees or buildings that cast the shade. There are fewer tall perennials that thrive in the shade compared



Cimicifuga
'Hillside Black Beauty'



Ligularia 'Britt-Marie Crawford'

with the good selection of smaller plants. Shrubs like *Ilex*, *Azalea*, and *Hydrangea* provide height and interest and do well in light-filtered shade, while in deeper shade they tend to get leggy as they reach for the light and flower coverage will diminish. Some of my favorite taller perennials that can be used en masse to fill the layer include *Cimicifuga*, *Aruncus*, *Kirengeshoma* and *Rodgersia*, *Aralia*, and *Ligularia*.

Cimicifuga can be used to add much needed height to the shade garden. I have used our native Appalachian species *Cimicifuga ramosa* in my former woodland garden in Minnesota. Its majestic 6 feet in height is impressive, the dark green compound leaves along the stem provide structure to the bottle-brush,

wand-like flowers that open late summer and are attractive to pollinators. After enjoying it in my former garden since 1995, it was interesting to pay a return visit a few years ago to observe what plants were still growing. Of the 2000 plus hostas, only a few were still there. It was the martagon lilies that had seeded around and naturalized and the *Cimicifuga* that had formed impressive colonies. I surmised that the deer browse and lack of irrigation diminished the

These have dark burgundy colored foliage and near-white fragrant flowers reminiscent of wild plum blossoms. These are among the most visited by pollinators in the fall. Like most plants, the darker the pigment in the foliage the slower the growth rate, and *C.* 'Hillside Black Beauty' and *C.* 'Chocoholic' will be more compact and slower growing than the green forms of the species.



hosta collection. The most commonly encountered *Cimicifuga* in the trade are the selections of the Asian form of *Cimicifuga racemosa*. Historically, *rubra* has been the preferred form but more recently *C.* 'Brunette' and then *C.* 'Hillside Black Beauty' and *C.* 'Chocoholic' have become crowd favorites.

Aruncus, or Spikenard, is represented by the charming dwarf Korean goat's beard *Aruncus aethusifolius* and the tall species *Aruncus dioicus*. The height of *Aruncus dioicus* fills a much-needed void in the garden in late spring. Cream-white astilbe-like flowers top the 5-foot clump in late May to June. The species

name *dioicus* refers to the male flowers and female flowers occurring on separate plants (“dioecious”). Plants available in the nursery trade are usually grown from seed and offered unsexed. Within the last 20 years hybrids between the two species have become available through tissue culture.

Kirengeshoma is a fantastic Asian perennial for shade. This hydrangea relative often referred to as Korean wax bells

forms a clump in late summer to early fall with soft yellow bell-shaped flowers. Again, filling the much-needed hole in the shade garden for height and late season floral interest, Korean wax bells can reach a nearly 4.5-5 feet in height

and width with maturity in moist, well drained soils and mimicking a shrub in the landscape. The large rounded leaves are scalloped and arranged in pairs along the stem. Best regarded as a



Kirengeshoma



Aralia 'Sun King'

foliage plant, it does have lovely soft yellow 1 inch bell-shaped flowers in August to September. The petals are very spongy if squeezed. For some reason this plant was commonly grown in Minnesota among shade gardeners during my time there but I see it less often here in Michigan. Korean wax bells are hardy in Zones 4 to 8 and very long lived. It can be propagated and shared with friends by division.

The corrugated, coarse-textured foliage of *Rodgersia* is a stark contrast to the smooth leaves of hostas. This relative of *Astilbe* and *Heuchera* loves (requires) more moisture than hosta to look its best. It also slowly forms large colonies when happy and may need dividing to keep it in check. In wet rainy springs the foliage may reach gigantic proportions. Basically, there are two types of *Rodgersia* – those with palmate leaves like a maple (palmata) and those with compound leaves more like a walnut leaf (*R. aesculifolia*). Most *Rodgersia* forms emerge in early spring with a bronze color, contrasting great with hostas. In cool springs it will last longer, and some forms hold their color longer. *Rodgersia* have white or soft pink flowers in large feathery plumes like an oversized astilbe in late spring. *Rodgersia* are deer and rabbit resistant so are a great option



where browsing is a problem. Often listed as hardy to Zone 5, I had a fairly large collection in Minnesota that I enjoyed for the many years I gardened there. *Rodgersia* are more of a collector plant than mainstream so probably will have to be mail ordered from the west coast.

Aralia racemosa 'Spikenard' is seldom seen in cultivation outside of Botanical Gardens. The exception is *Aralia* 'Sun King'. *Aralia* 'Sun King' is a gold foliated selection of the Japanese *Aralia cordata* and in my opinion one

of the top 5 shade plants to hit the market in the last 20 years. Discovered by Barry Yinger in the nursery section of a department store in Japan in the early 1990s and introduced to the American gardening market through his mail order nursery Asiatica, it has everything one could wish for in a foliage plant. Hardy from Zone 4-9, large glowing yellow compound leaves that is clump forming, and grows 6 feet high and 6 feet wide plants that are great for the back of the shade garden. Perhaps its only flaw by gardeners' standards is that it takes several years to reach this size. Often gardeners will place it in a space along a walk or near other plants and it will outgrow its boundaries on maturity. It does have insignificant tiny white flowers followed by dark purple-black elderberry-like fruit that will produce seedlings resembling the parent.

Ligularia is another large, bold textured plant. My favorite species is *Ligularia japonica*. Native to Asia, *Ligularia* 'Sichuan Lace' is an exceptionally vigorous form with the typical serrated and lobed foliage. It traces back to a botanical expedition to Sichuan around the year 2000. Orange daisy-like flowers are arranged in a cluster on top of the clump in midsummer and is more interesting than attractive. *Ligularia* 'Tractor Seat' is a hybrid between *L. 'Sichuan Lace'* and *L. 'Britt-Marie*



Crawford'. Immense heart shaped leaves with serrated margins are the size and shape of the old Model B John Deere tractor. *Ligularia* prefer uniformly moist soil and they are notorious for doing the temporary mid-day wilt like a spooked opossum if warm sunny days cause an environment where the leaves transpire at a rate greater than drawing up moisture. The leaves always perk back up in late afternoon.



Gardeners always love cool and exciting plants that are perhaps rare, difficult to propagate, or appealing to an acquired taste. *Arisaema*, *Lycoris*, *Podophyllum*, hardy *Impatiens*, *Begonias*, and *Bergenia* fall into this category.

Almost everyone has heard of the jack-in-the-pulpit, *Arisaema triphyllum*. Native to moist woodland areas throughout eastern and southern North America, it is always fun to see in May on the woodland hikes with columbine and wild phlox. Interestingly, hooded flowers hold a pencil shaped “minister” in a podium surrounded by a pair of trifoliate leaves. For garden use, forms with black stems and black hoods are the most

interesting. *Arisaema* ‘Pinstripe’ is a solid green form with white veins that is especially choice, as is the cultivar named *A.* ‘Black Jack’ where the entire plant is a uniform mahogany black color. Asian forms like *A. sikokianum* and *A. ringens* have choice flowers and are great pop-up plants for adding interest among ferns and *Epimedium* in the woodland garden. But if one

really wants to add a magnificent *Arisaema* for summer interest *Arisaema consanguineum* is the one to consider. Emerging in early-summer after one has all but given up hope, it is a welcome surprise for adding drama to the garden. Its tall

stems carry a whorl of leaves – always in an odd number but usually 9-13 covering a typical jack-in-the-pulpit-like flower, and there is a lot of diversity in this species. Choice selections like *Arisaema consanguineum* ‘The Perfect Wave’ have wide leaves with incredibly exaggerated string-like appendages called drip tips at the end of



their leaves and a hood covering on the flower. Some forms have silver centers to the foliage, a percentage coming true from seed. Usually, these Asian species are mail order plants available from specialty nurseries, but they can also easily be raised from seed.

*Lycoris*

I first purchased a *Lycoris*, sometimes called hardy amaryllis or surprise lily, through a mail order from Gurney's Nursery as a teenager and planted it at the edge of my parents' vegetable garden not far from the row of daffodils. In early spring the blue-green foliage — identical to daffodil foliage — appears and persists until the summers turn hot and the foliage ripens and deteriorates exactly like the daffodil foliage. In August, amaryllis-looking pink flowers appear almost overnight and last for a couple weeks, usually during the dog days of summer when color and interest is waning in the shade garden. After several years my mom called me to the garden one spring and told me to dig out the daffodils in the corner as they "didn't amount to anything and never bloomed." I tried to tell her those weren't daffodils, but the magic pink lilies that flowered without foliage every fall. That was about the time I left for college, but they didn't seem to appear in late summer after that conversation.

*Podophyllum*

I wouldn't recommend our native mayapple as a "companion plant" for the shade garden. This rapid colonizer serves an important role in soil stability in nature but quickly covers more ground than city gardeners prefer dedicated to a single plant. The Asian species and hybrids are both more attractive in foliage and less aggressive in habit. *Podophyllum peltatum* has glossy foliage that looks like it has been coated with cooking oil. More robust than our

native species and with larger leaves, it has clusters of deep burgundy ribbon-like flowers under the foliage. Other amazing hybrids may be available by specialty nurseries such as *P. 'Kaleidoscope'*, *P. 'Spotty Dotty'*, and *P. 'Red Panda'*. They are worth searching for if one loves unusual woodland plants. Podophyllums like moist well drained woodsy soils and emerge very early spring, earlier than hostas. Unfortunately, they are frost sensitive and here in Michigan will have to be covered most springs to prevent freezing and turning to mush. The Asian mayapples may be propagated by root cuttings or inadvertently propagated when digging other plants in close proximity.

For some reason I'm not a huge fan of planting annual impatiens and begonias with hostas in my garden. I enjoy both annuals and appreciate

the orange-colored impatiens with yellow and blue hostas. It could be my frugal Scandinavian upbringing that I only had so much money for plants and I would prefer to spend it on a perennial plant that returned year after year rather than an annual. However, I love the hardy *Begonia grandis*. Herb Benedict grew it in his Hillsdale, Michigan garden, and pieces of it hitched rides with hostas from his garden to Hideko Gowen's garden in Minnesota, where I first saw it. It took several years for me to believe a begonia was truly hardy in Minnesota as the more tender types turned to black mush at the first mention of frost. The same can be said about impatiens, although once again there are impatiens that are hardy enough to survive the brutal Minnesota winters. These perennial types are grown for their foliage and have an understated beauty. Over time in a good garden setting, they can form a nice colony. *Impatiens omeiana* has several selections with stunning foliage.

Last but not least *Bergenia cordifolia*, should be in everyone's yard that have children visiting.



Begonia grandis



Podophyllum

The classic hybrids have thick, glossy evergreen leaves that often have a reddish cast over winter. Perhaps American gardeners don't spend as much time outdoors in the winter as European gardeners, but *Bergenia* have never captured the hearts of gardeners here as they do overseas. However, *Bergenia cordifolia* 'Miss Piggy', sometimes called pigsqueak, has an attractive, persistent foliage with pink or white flowers and is reminiscent of hyacinth blooms in early spring. Recent introductions featuring tetraploid forms that have even larger flowers and sporadically rebloom under good conditions. *Bergenia* 'Miss Piggy' and *B. 'Sakura'* are among the best. But if I were to grow only one *Bergenia* it would be *B. 'Ripple Effect'*. It is the

Hosta "Empress Wu" of the *Bergenia* world. This interspecific hybrid between the traditional type and the species *Bergenia ciliata*, *B. 'Ripple Effect'* has massive two-foot leaves comprising a clump that reaches 4 feet or broader. Compared to the more common purpurea types, *Bergenia* 'Ripple Effect' goes dormant in fall and does not have evergreen leaves. Clusters of white flowers bloom before the leaves emerge in spring.

What a great time to be gardening with all of these exciting shade plants! The diversity and quality of the selections of many of these were not available when I began my journey down the shady hosta path.



Photos in this article by Hans Hansen.

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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

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