

MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS



Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society

Hosta College — Fun, Affordable, and Educational!

By Don Rawson

Socializing with fellow hosta lovers is always enjoyable and Hosta College is no exception. For those who have never attended, Hosta College is an annual event hosted by the Great Lakes Region Hosta Society, held at the Upper Valley Career Center in Piqua, Ohio. The program offers educational sessions, vendors, auctions, a raffle, and plenty of fellowship with other gardening enthusiasts. The event focuses on growing and caring for hostas and other plants, as well as a wide range of other gardening-related subjects. This year, thirty different classes are offered by experienced teachers who are sure to keep your attention. It is a great way to jumpstart your enthusiasm for spring!

Hosta College, however, is more than just an educational experience. It is a lot of fun! A lively plant auction on Friday evening precedes Saturday’s activities. Hundreds of hostas, companion plants, and other items are made available, including some hard-to-find varieties. Vending is also open, where you will find the latest, greatest and newest introductions. The doors open at 6:00pm sharp!

Saturday is jam-packed, beginning with a complimentary continental breakfast. Then things get into full swing with five classes of your choice, a cafeteria-style luncheon, and an evening banquet, followed by a final presentation to close out the event.

Did we mention that Hosta College is very affordable? Just \$50 to attend. And that includes a free hosta, breakfast, and lunch. You cannot find a better deal!

Registration will begin in February. Don’t miss out! For further information, visit HostaCollege.org.





Attend The 33rd Annual Great Lakes Region Hosta College

Friday & Saturday
March 20 & 21, 2026
Upper Valley Career Center
8811 Career Drive
Piqua, OH 45356

Friday Night 6-9 pm Open To The Public

6 - 9 pm
Vending area is open to buy hostas, rare trees, alpine plants, shade perennials, garden ornaments and related garden items.

7 - 9 pm
An auction of rare and unusual hostas, perennials, and other garden related items.

Saturday

7:30 - 8:30 am & 3:40 pm - 5:00 pm
Vending open

8:40 am - 3:40 pm
Your choice of 5 classes and cafeteria style lunch

Registration will begin
February 2026

Please visit HostaCollege.org
for complete details

2026 Hosta College Classes

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advantages of Wrens in Your Garden Snow Tolerant Early Blooms Perennials Worth Planting in 2026 Baptisia at its Best Hydrangeas for Every Garden Creative Designs with Recycled Materials Ron's Favorite Witch Hazels Houseplants I Have Known and Loved Stunning Spring Gardens Using Bulbs "The Late Show" Jazz Up Your Container Garden How to Successfully Raise Honey Bees Hummingbird Fun Current Topics on Hostas The Next Big Thing in Perennials at Walters Hellebores: Winter's Jewel Tips that Save Time Use Native Plants in Your Yard Creating Microclimates Herbs in Harmony | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hostas and Their Shady Friends Soil Preparation for Your Garden All About Hostas Advanced Hybridizing 2026 Butterfly Oasis-Build a Waterer What to do about Hosta Pests How to Set up a Plant Exchange Cohesion VS Chaos-Creating Design in the Collector's Garden 365 Days of Bloom Common Spring Flowers of the Midwest Succulent Sensations: Create your Own Planter The Glory of Autumn Designing our Garden; Despite What My Husband Thought The Joy of Daylilies in Your Garden Painting With Pam Waking Up Your Lawn Current Science Research on Hostas Goat Milk Soap Making Demonstration |
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The Dates!

Hosta College

March 20 & 21, 2026 in Piqua, OH

Registration starts February 14 for GLRHS members and February 15 for non-members. Registration closes March 5. Special room rates of \$80 are available at Comfort Inn in Piqua, OH (first come, first serve), available by using the Hosta College website. Special rates also available at the Fairfield Inn in Troy, OH using the Hosta College website.

<https://hostacollege.org/>

MHS Workshop

May 23, 2026 at Hidden Lake Gardens

More information to come.

AHS National Convention

June 10-13, 2026 in Dublin, OH

<https://americanhostasociety.org/events-awards/annual-ahs-convention/>

MHS Plant Sale

June 20, 2026 at Hidden Lake Gardens

More information to come.

Hosta Tailgate

June 26-27, 2026 in Toledo, OH

<https://hostacollege.org/>

MHS Fall Workshop

August 23, 2026 at Hidden Lake Gardens

More information to come.



Q: What do you get if you cross a four-leaf clover with poison ivy?

A: A rash of good luck.

Q: How did the millionaire gardener get rich so quick?

A: He was running a huge pansy scheme.

Q: I told my wife that what she is wearing is inappropriate for gardening.

A: But she's digging in her heels.

Q: What kind of socks does a gardener wear?

A: Garden hose!

Q: What happened to the plant in math class?

A: It grew square roots!

Q: What did the big flower say to the little flower?

A: What's up, bud?

Hairy Invaders in Your Garden!

By Don Rawson

Winter is the time of year when we can finally take a break from all our normal gardening duties. Right after the holiday season, we go into winter hibernation — plopping down in our recliner to watch TV, putting a puzzle together, reading a book or browsing a plant catalog, or pursuing our favorite craft. What you may not know, however, is that while you are zoning out, a few hairy pests have likely invaded your lawn and garden. These devious creatures have seemingly appeared out of nowhere. They have multiplied rapidly and are growing discreetly under the cover of snow, and you will be quite alarmed when you encounter them in spring. These sneaky little life forms are known as hairy bittercress.

Hairy bittercress is a member of the mustard family. It is a winter annual, meaning it germinates in the fall, grows during the winter, and then kicks into high gear in spring. This cool-season weed can go from zero to “How did it take over my yard?” in no time at all. Shortly after the snow melts, you are faced with a sudden outbreak of tiny white flowers and umbrella-like leaves in your lawn or garden. Chances are you’ve already met this sneaky intruder.

A common weed that has spread globally, hairy bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) is originally from Eurasia, but has been naturalizing throughout North America, Africa, and Australia due to human introduction and its efficient seed dispersal. It was in the late 19th century when this invasive species came to our country,

Hairy Bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*)

- A member of the mustard family
- Low-growing rosette of round, lobed leaves
- Small white flowers with four petals
- Long, narrow seed pods that explode when touched
- Grows in early spring, before your lawn greens up
- Often found in damp, shady, or bare areas
- Fine hairs on the leaves and stems — thus the name “hairy” bittercress



Photo by Don Rawson in our garden, 11/25/2025

Hairy bittercress (*Cardamine hirsuta*) is a common weed throughout the world. It is well adapted to moist, disturbed soils. Being a prolific seed producer, it spreads like wildfire.

spreading rapidly and becoming a common weed in disturbed soils and lawns. It is adaptable to moist areas, so it emerges wherever we irrigate. It can form expansive mats, as well

How Hairy Bittercress Germinates and Spreads

- Germinates in late fall when temperatures start to cool
- You won't notice much at first — it grows low and slow over winter
- By early spring, it matures quickly, setting seed that is dispersed easily
- Plants die back when summer heat rolls in

as being a nuisance in greenhouses where it pops up in and around containers.

Life Cycle

Depending on the climate, hairy bittercress may complete two generations in a year, one in the spring and one in the fall. The seeds germinate in the fall, with young plants remaining green and growing throughout winter before flowering in spring. Once established, it is difficult to eradicate.

This tiny plant might seem quite harmless, but it spreads like wildfire. Once the seed pods mature, they literally launch seeds several feet in all directions. As soon as they're dry, even a light touch (from mowing, walking, or wind) triggers them to explode and shoot seeds up to 5 feet away. A single plant can produce hundreds

of seeds, and then you've got entire colonies of bittercress popping up all over next year. And remember, each of those new plants will repeat the process again next year. So, one plant going to seed is all it takes to launch a full-blown invasion.

Combatting an Existing Invasion

Once you've noticed an outbreak of hairy bittercress, the most crucial step is to keep plants from maturing and setting more seed. Allowing those seeds to sprout will certainly worsen the situation and set the stage for trouble in years to come.

In flower beds, most hairy bittercress plants come out easily by hand or with the aid of a weeding tool when the plants are young. Pulling weeds after watering or a good rain makes the task effortless. The soil will be looser and the entire plant will come up without a struggle. And remember, be sure to do it before the seed



Photo by Aelwyn. Used by permission.

If left unchecked, a sudden outbreak of tiny white flowers will ultimately result in a proliferation of seed capsules, ready to burst open, ushering in an entirely new population of tiny plantlets.

Pods mature — or you'll end up triggering the seed-launching apparatus.

Weeds in garden beds also can be spot-sprayed with non-selective herbicides (such as Roundup) or with herbicides labeled for control of broadleaf weeds. Check to ensure that hairy bittercress is included on the list of weeds controlled. Do so on a calm day, as any spray that drifts onto nearby landscape plants will likely injure or kill those too.

Apply when daytime temperatures are consistently above 50°F. You'll want to spray while the plant is actively growing, but before it drops seed. That is your best shot at halting the spread.

In the lawn, regular mowing will chop off the flower stems before the seeds have a chance to mature. Hairy bittercress in the lawn can also be killed with most liquid or granular broadleaf weed-killers formulated for lawns. These work best when plants are actively growing, which means that in the case of early growers like hairy bittercress, applications need to be made earlier than the usual mid-spring time frame.



Photo by Aung. Used by permission.

A single plant can produce hundreds of seeds and it has a very efficient apparatus for seed dispersal. Just a light touch from mowing, walking, or wind triggers them to explode and shoot seeds up to 5 feet away.



A foam kneeling pad or stool makes the task of weeding a bit more bearable. It provides essential cushioning and shock absorption, protecting your knees from hard, cold, or rocky ground, reducing soreness and fatigue, and keeping your clothes cleaner while you work. This one is available from Lowes for \$31.69.

Prevention is the Best Medicine

While pulling and spraying can clean up a current outbreak of bittercress, that likely won't keep new weeds from germinating in the fall that will lead to a repeat problem next winter.

In garden beds, a two-inch layer of mulch can help stifle the seeds and

prevent them from germinating. In addition, a late-season application of Preen Extended Control Weed Preventer will stop seeds from germinating for up to six months. The ideal timing is late summer to early fall — just before hairy

bittercress starts to germinate. This product can also be applied over mulch, giving flower beds double protection. A second application can be done in spring.



Photo by Preen, Inc.

Preen Extended Control provides longer weed prevention (up to 6 months) by adding a second active ingredient to the original Preen formula, which lasts around 3 months. It is a better option to prevent the germination of hairy bittercress in late fall and early spring.

In the lawn, the best defense is to encourage healthy, dense grass, which lessens the possibility for any new weed seeds to sprout. Consistent proper turf care focuses on aeration, overseeding with quality seed, fertilizing, and correct mowing and watering.

The key is to shut down bittercress before it ever gets a chance to sprout. To do so, use a fall pre-emergent. Since hairy bittercress germinates in fall, applying a pre-emergent at that time is your best move to prevent it from showing up in early spring.

Timing is important. Apply a pre-emergent when soil temperatures start dropping into the 70s — usually mid to late fall. These products

form a barrier in the soil, preventing bittercress and other winter annuals from ever getting started.

Hairy Bittercress: Is It Good for Anything?

It's edible. Yep, hairy bittercress is edible and delicious! It is a favorite among foragers and wild food enthusiasts. Often considered a wild microgreen with a mild, peppery flavor, hairy bittercress is rich in antioxidants, vitamins C & K, calcium, and beta-carotene, making it a nutritious addition to soups, salads, and sandwiches. If you are pulling it from your garden beds, skip the compost pile and send it your stomach instead!

Harvest the young leaves before they flower for the best taste, as older leaves can get a bit tough and bitter. As a note of caution, only consume

How to Make Your Lawn More Weed-Proof

- Mow regularly, but not too short!
- Aerate and overseed in fall to improve density
- Apply fertilizer 2-4 times per year to keep lawn thick and healthy
- Water as needed to promote deep roots and drought tolerance
- Improve drainage in low spots or compacted areas
- Spray any weeds before they go to seed
- Apply a pre-emergent herbicide in fall

hairy bittercress if you are sure it has not been treated with herbicides or fertilizers.

Summary

As an aggressive winter annual, hairy bittercress is a weed to watch for. This noxious plant has a very efficient seed dispersal system, and once established, it is difficult to eradicate. The key is to shut down bittercress before it ever has an opportunity to sprout by applying a fall pre-emergent. Weeds in garden beds in spring can be pulled or spot-sprayed. The most crucial step is to keep plants from maturing and setting more seed. Allowing those seeds to disperse and germinate will worsen the situation and set the stage for trouble in future years.



Photo from Cornell University.

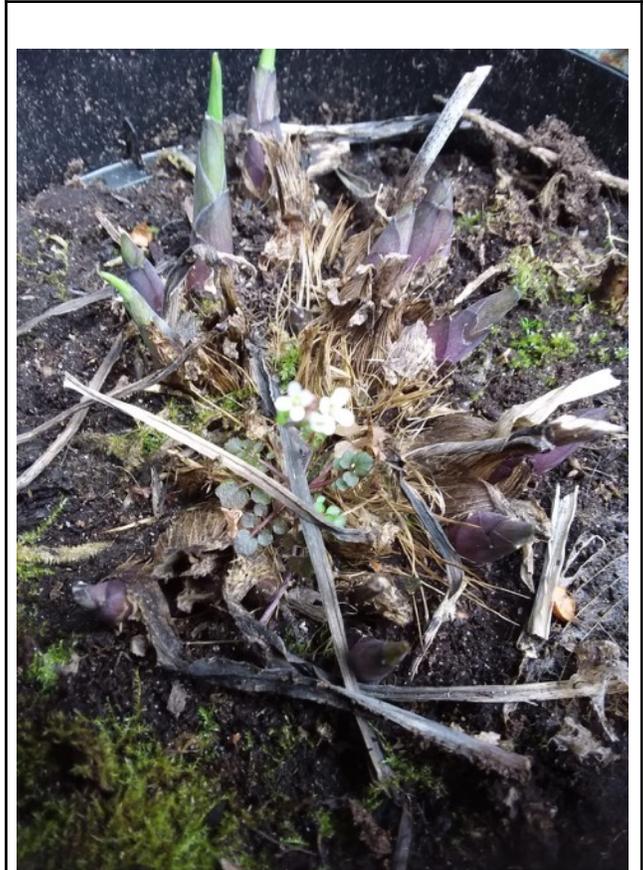


Photo by Yvonne van Beek.

Hairy bittercress is a sneaky little pest. It is a nuisance to greenhouses where it pops up in and around containers. Here, it is hijacking a hosta.



Photo from Julia's Edible Weeds.

Hairy bittercress in a warm beet salad.

Crumbs From a Seasoned Gardener

by Hans Hansen

I have written numerous articles about gardening over the years with most of the topics being garden design and plant selection or my experience with a single genus. This article is a story about reflecting back on gardens I have had in the past and what I have learned from them.

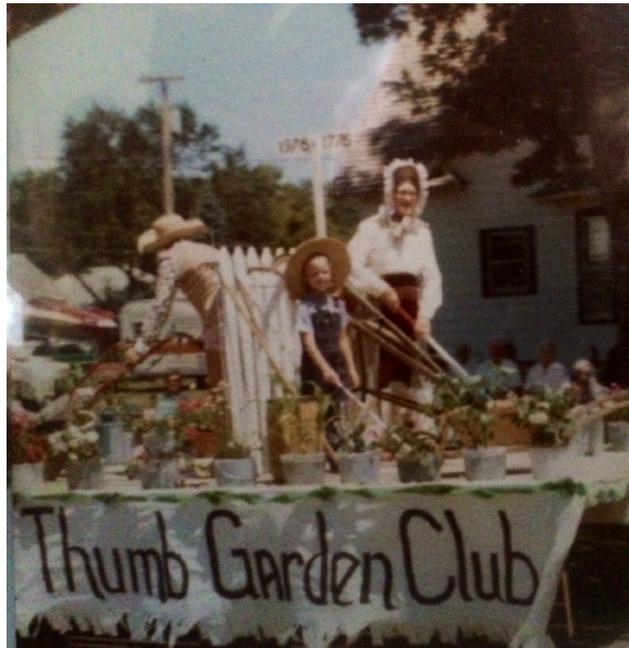
Landscape historian Mac Griswold once said, “gardening is the slowest of the performing arts,” a sentiment I agree with wholeheartedly. Gardeners fall into several categories; First - Those that want their yard to look nice. Plant selection is secondary but minimal maintenance is key. Second - Gardeners that are knowledgeable about plants and want the plants to perform to their optimal potential. Third - The passionate gardener who probably puts

plants or the love of plants above most other things. This is the category I fit in.

I was born and raised on a dairy farm in southwestern Minnesota, USDA zone 4. I had energy levels off the chart and enthusiasm to match between the ages 5-22. During those years I had nearly unlimited gardening time and space to create gardens. Our farm after all was 360 acres in size. But my two greatest

limitations were availability of plants and income to purchase them. My window into the world of horticulture was mainly through farm wives that maintained ornamental flower gardens next to their vegetable gardens on the farms. There were 3 active garden clubs near a town of around 400 people – The

Green Thumb Garden Club, The Hope and Hoe, and the Red Rock Garden Club. My mom was a member of the Green Thumb Garden Club and I would tag along with her to the meetings. Although I don't remember a lot about them, I do know it was a



barometer of who gardened in the community and it was a way to get plants from the plant sales and exchanges. Also, someone mentioned “you can always tell how much of a green thumb someone has by the amount of dirt under

mail ordered seeds from Gurney’s in Yankton, South Dakota, and when I was 10 years old, convinced my dad that Gurney’s would be a great vacation destination.



Hans as a child with the same iris plant as an adult at his childhood home in Minnesota.

the fingernails,” and the folks in The Hope and Hoe Garden Club were more into social gatherings than exchange of plant knowledge. There was a local nursery 15 miles away in Windom, Minnesota called Farmer Seed and Nursery; I loved the smell of Excelsa Cedar shavings. The diversity of plant material, garden seeds, and bulbs to this kid made my eyes bulge out. That was where I purchased my first hostas as a teenager, ‘August Moon’, ‘Blue Max’ (tokudama) and ‘Krossa Regal’. I also

During this era, I only knew plants by their common names and was unaware of hardiness issues in my little world. I also cherished plants for the sheer beauty of them as well as from those who gave them to me. None of the plants in my garden were labeled and they were organized by rows. Curiosity and wonderment were high. I remember opening tulip and iris buds days before they naturally opened to see what color they would be. Because flowers were used for church decorations on Sundays,

hospital visits, and trips to see friends and family in nursing homes, the sole value was cut flower use.

My greatest influencer was Margery Grant who lived a half mile north of our farm. Her husband Walt and my dad farmed together. Margery was my mentor, and I thought the world of her. As far back as I can remember, she seemed to know more about nature, history, and life than anyone else. I spent countless hours helping weed the gardens, learning about native plants and garter snakes. She taught me that everything has a purpose and just because you see a snake doesn't mean you have to kill it. She also taught me to collect warm eggs from her laying hens, we went fishing, and she taught me about nature. Margery washed clothes with a wringer washing machine, hung clothes on the line, and allowed a calico cat to come in her house. (My dad held a strong belief that animals belonged in a barn).



After graduating college in 1993 and getting a job at Shady Oaks Nursery, I purchased a house on a 5-acre wooded property. The house was split level and built in the 1970s. It was subdivided from a 13-acre parcel east of Waseca, MN and was located on a windy road called The Snake Trail. Located between two marshy lakes, the virgin woods were comprised of a mix of basswood, green ash, red oak, black walnut, hickory, and hackberry. More impressively, the hardwood forest had sandy loam soil and was covered in millions of spring ephemerals. There was nothing that could ever come close to the spectacular spring progression of northern

wildflowers coming into bloom beginning with the *Hepatica acutiloba*. Other later emerging plants included bloodroot (*Sanguinaria*), spring beauty (*Claytonia*), and next, the white trout lily (*Erythronium albidum*), Dutchman's britches (*Phlox divaricata*), and finishing with the Jack-in-the-pulpits (*Arisaema triphyllum*), False Rue-anemone (*Enemion biternatum*), Canadian wild ginger (*Asarum canadensis*), and bellwort (*Uvularia grandiflora*). I spent countless hours botanizing the woods making selections of superior color forms and patterns of the hepaticas and other native woodland native plants.

Immediately after moving into the house, I began organizing beds, studying the topography, and dreaming about the gardens. The first few years my dad helped me thin some of the trees and limb up branches to have a higher canopy allowing better light for hostas. I remember friends asking my dad why he was making the 2-hour trip to my home to cut down trees if I bought the place because of the trees. My father in his typical dry humor said "apparently all the trees were in the wrong places." Over the next 15 years I assembled and collected numerous plants, the majority being hostas and peonies. I joined the American Hosta Society and became a life member in 1994. It was through my work at Shady Oaks and the AHS that I networked and met friends and colleagues in the nursery industry that would mentor and change my life.

I designed the hosta beds by the genetic background. The main beds were Montana sports and hybrids, tokudama sports and hybrids, sieboldianas, venustas, ventricosas, and



The Waseca, Minnesota years

in the sunny area, plantaginea hybrids. It was a great way to study, contrast, and compare the similarities and differences. I had over 2,000 named varieties, not including thousands of unnamed seedlings.

As time went on ferns, epimedium and martagon lilies were added to the collection.

The only large area I had that was mostly sun was along the road from the driveway to the end of my property and this area became my herbaceous peony garden. By the time I finished my gardening years there, I had around 500 varieties of herbaceous peonies and 250 varieties of



tree peonies. Because this was the most visible area of the property, neighbors could see me working in the garden. I remember several evenings cars slowing down and friends would yell, "Hansen, go inside! It's dark now!"

By 2008 nearly all of the 5 acres were developed into a shade garden with grass paths meandering through the woods, high shade providing the ideal environment for hostas, ferns, and companion plants. I had supplemented the woody palette with hardy magnolias, joined the magnolia society, and

began raising hybrids from seed. Deer discovered the garden and once again my dad and my brother came to the rescue and helped me install a woven plastic deer fence from

Farm-Tech that was very effective in discouraging the deer. The garden was all-consuming. I spent nearly all my waking hours outside of work tending it, but I enjoyed it and gardening had become my life.

In the spring of 2009, I accepted a job with Walters Gardens (WGI) as Director of New Plant Development. It was my dream job. I had nothing to do all day except breed plants,

but it came with the price of having to leave my garden of 15 years, my family, and my friends. On June 4, 2009 I began working at WGI in Zeeland, Michigan, which is two USDA hardiness zones warmer. Zeeland, Michigan is a zone 6 compared to my previous home located in zone 4. I also had more diversity than just working with hostas like I did at Shady Oaks. At Walters I work with nearly 80 genera of plants, hybridizing, evaluating and studying them for horticulture performance and ornamental value. In the spring of 2010, I bought a house in Zeeland on a corner lot, downsizing from 5



acres to ¼ acre. Once again, the soil was a sandy base, this time nearly pure Michigan beach sand. My residential lot is nearly full sun exposure with the shade provided by a stand of wild cherry trees along the southern border and the north side of the house. With a blank slate I quickly laid out the beds for the lot ultimately ending up with perimeter beds along the 2 streets and the south part of the property and then foundation plantings. There was a space for a rock garden along the driveway. Next, I amended the soil with 20 pickup loads of 4-year-old horse manure which I credit as the secret to my success. I think the biggest change from gardening on 5 acres in the woods to gardening on a city corner lot, aside from the space, is the visibility. In Minnesota I could be gardening for days and not see anyone if I was working behind my house. In Zeeland it was if I

was in a fishbowl with folks driving by, walking their dogs, or kids playing on the streets. I screened myself from the road with a 20-25 foot wide bed planted with seven *Thuja occidentalis* ‘DeGroot’s Spire’ arborvitae in an alternating pattern, and the far corner was planted with a group of seven Weeping Alaskan Cedars which became a living sculpture. Various other shrubs and taller perennials were added and have matured to give a feel of privacy to the garden.

Creativity and design work come into play when I still had the appetite of a 5-acre gardener on a ¼ acre lot. After the bones provided by the conifers were put into place, I still planted a wide variety of perennials and bulbs. I limited my color pallet to give the garden unity and continuity. I primarily use yellows, blues, and oranges in all of the beds with the exception of



the long perimeter bed along the south part of the garden where I use pink colors. I repeat the same plant material and color scheme and rely on color echoes to draw the eye throughout the bed.



limited space. I probably have over 2,000 varieties of plants in my corner lot. With layering, the shorter groundcover type plants are used in the front of the bed, medium heights in the center followed by tall in the back. If it is an



Peony seed & *Paeonia villosa*

Waves of color come and go throughout the season beginning in April with the *Galanthus* collection, followed by the daffodils. In July, *Orienpet* lilies take center stage followed by hundreds of blue *Agapanthus* complimented by orange *Asclepias* and *Kniphofias*. Late summer, into fall, the garden relies heavily on foliage with dozens “hot color” blooming crepe myrtles. Late fall is glorious with the autumn color of the Japanese maples, amsonias, stewartias, and ginkgos. Winter is also a welcome season because of the conifer collection, grasses, and perennial seedheads allowed to age in place.

I layer plant material in all the beds with the exception of the rock garden. There are several benefits to this landscape style. One can grow an astonishing amount of plant material in a

island bed, the concept is repeated on the other side. Bulbs like lilies, eucomis, and daffodils are primarily vertical and don't require a lot of space. They are used as pop-ups throughout the beds and the taller flowering height without the foliar canopy can be used closer to the viewer. Bulbs can also be nestled in and among nepetas, calaminthas, baptisias, and the like. The concept is similar to multi-cropping with cover crops where the bare ground is covered at all times making weeding almost not necessary. When planting bulbs, I have chopped through patches of groundcover sedum and creeping phlox to plant daffodils, crocus, and *Galanthus*. The bulbs look like they are in a more natural environment when in flower and after they go summer dormant there is not a void in the landscape marking where they have been.



Seed collecting & drying

Compared to my previous gardens, the current garden is a landscape rather than a collection of perennials with a wide diversity of plant material. I have approximately 50 choice hostas rather than the insane collection from the prior garden. With the size restrictions, I enjoy gardening more, I have a more balanced approach for time management with friends and family, and I notice the smaller details and day-to-day changes. I still collect plants. I enjoy hybridizing and raising Galanthus and miniature narcissus, but the dedication to space and time is a fraction of what it would take for hostas or baptisias.

Lessons I learned along the way:

- I still hear the words of wisdom from my mom and dad echoing through the ages, “you don’t need to have one of everything,” and “you don’t need more plants when you can’t take care of what you’ve got.” Yes, when I was in elementary school, I would walk from the city park to my grandparents’ house through the alleys because that’s where the gardens were. Later I would ask my parents if they would stop by their house and ask if we could get a start of an iris color I didn’t have. My parents were very resilient, and although it was a tiny town of less than 400 people, it must have been embarrassing for them to ask for plants. That said, gardeners loved to share and I developed lifelong friendships with many of them. Some would even drop divisions off at my parent’s farm for me when they had extra.
- Some of the most special plants are gifts from friends. I received my first double

fernleaf peony when I was a teenager and for decades have enjoyed the plant in all of my gardens. The last time I was visiting my dad before he died involved the fernleaf peony. The family farm was 2 hours from Waseca and I was home for Thanksgiving. He mentioned how nice the fernleaf peonies were. There were rows of them in the garden by that point and they were emerging from the ground. The fall had been an extended warm one and I was concerned about their emergence since the flower bud is at the top of the growing point. He and I went to the garden with spades and mounded dirt over each of the clumps. That was the last time I spent with my dad; he died unexpectedly a few days later.

- Share plants with others, "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Sharing brings me joy. I love hearing from other gardeners when a

plant I have shared with them exceeded their expectations. Sharing is also an insurance policy. If the plant in my garden dies, there is a backup somewhere.

- Gardens and gardeners age while tastes change. We need to be flexible. You don't have to be committed to a plant for life. Perennial introductions improve over time and it is perfectly fine to upgrade. Hosta 'Francis Williams' for example, unless grown for sentimental attachments, can be upgraded with H. 'Olive Bailey Langdon' or 'Terms of Endearment' which have superior performance. Unless one is attached to double daffodils as cut flowers, many aren't weather proof and will fall to the ground in a spring rainstorm. Plants that



Double Fernleaf Peony



Miniature daffodils

are overly rambunctious usually take up more space than the joy they provide and unless the gardener has unlimited space and needs a ground cover, plants that have a clumping habit are a better option. I enjoy Convallaria,

ajuga, and ostrich fern in other folks' gardens rather than mine.

- The same goes with commonly planted lilacs, forsythia, and Stella de Oro daylilies. Even though I love them, and I also had a substantial lilac collection at one time, I now also enjoy these plants in other people's gardens.
- Many perennials aside from peonies, baptisias, and to some extent hostas will need to be divided and refreshed over time. Conifers, even the dwarf types that only grow a couple inches per year (in each direction), will take up more room than when they were planted. After gardening in the same place for over 15 years I have begun "subtraction landscaping." The dwarf birds nest spruce, dwarf Montgomery spruce, and this year 10 other dwarf conifers were removed and transplanted to a business with more space. Cotinus, Physocarpus, Calycanthus are cut back nearly to the ground every 10 years or less to reflush and keep in scale with the city lot. Gardens evolve and without watching the landscape as a whole, woody plants have a way of taking more space than originally planned.

If you are reading this you are undoubtedly a member of a Hosta Society. If you haven't already, expand your horizon and join another plant group that interests you. One of my favorite organizations is NARGS — the North American Rock Garden Society. Like the American Hosta Society, there are color journals and national meetings. However, NARGS also has an exchange of seed with other members of

the society. Every year members collect seed from their garden, send it to a central processing center, and then receive a seed catalog with that year's offering of special and rare seed.

Growing plants from seed is one of life's purest joys and in some cases is the only way to get the cool things other gardeners are growing.

The NARGS membership is comprised of people with an incredibly varied focus of interest ranging from bulbs, alpines, woody plants, and rare perennials. The unifying trait is the plants are compact and, in some cases, require special attention. In my experience, meeting the group in person is a wonderful experience with networking and interacting with amazing people that in many cases have devoted their entire lifetime to gardening.



NARGS seed exchange

Plants labeled "difficult" may just require patience or the proper siting. For years I assumed that one needed laboratory conditions

to germinate hardy orchids (Bletilla). Once I learned that they are among the easiest plants to germinate under proper conditions I ended up with thousands of them. They, like ferns, are sown on damp potting soil that has first had boiling water poured over the media and new container. After the soil has cooled, the fern spores or orchid seeds are carefully sprinkled on the surface and then immediately sealed in a new Ziplock bag. The trays are placed in bright light in a warm environment but out of direct sunlight. In greenhouses they will have to have shade cloth or some fabric to reduce light levels. Then it is just a matter of time until the plantlets are ready to be gradually acclimated from their miniature greenhouse environment to ambient conditions. I usually wean them under a plastic dome for a week until they are strong enough to make it without extra humidity. This process allows one to have new hybrids, forms, or multiple plants of special ferns and Bletillas.

Don't be discouraged from trying new plants just because friends may tell you they will take many years to flower from seed. As a kid right out of college I was interested in raising peonies from seed. A good friend in the peony trade told me it would take 7 years, and that was just too long of a time to wait for flowers. Generally, it's the worst-case scenario information that is passed down or exaggerated, and there are probably ways to speed up the process. That, combined with planting the seeds annually, will pay dividends. I have been raising peonies from seed since 1994 and it's hard to explain the thrill of seeing a cross come to flower for the first time. Some peony species flower in as few as 3 to 4 years, and an important trick is to plant the



**One year old Bletilla
&
Bletilla seeds**



seed immediately as soon as it is ripe in late summer. If the peony seed transitions from the warm brown color to dark black and shrivels from losing moisture it will take at least another seasonal cycle of warm and cold temperatures before germinating.

Some of the most interesting and charming peonies are the species or F1 hybrids. These are rare or absent in the nursery trade but often available through the generosity of Botanical Gardens and collectors. If it were not for Will McLewin, the Scottish Rock Garden Society, and NARGS, I would not have the fascinating assortment of botanical peonies in my garden. Many of the species types will do reasonably well in shade.

Daffodils and magnolias are two additional genera that have a reputation for taking forever. I was told narcissus take at least 7 years from seed to flower, but I've flowered the miniature types in as few

as 3 years. The miniatures are my passion, and by making crosses annually there will always be new crosses to flower. My preference for the

miniature daffodils over the large types developed for the show bench is that the smaller ones have narrower and less obtrusive leaves as the foliage ripens and feeds the bulbs after flowering.

Last but not least and most importantly, I was taught in garden clubs that plant-folks are the best

people. Most true gardeners by nature are generous, and compassionate. I have gone from a very young gardener to a middle aged gardener outliving all but one of my early childhood gardening friends. What I cherish are the memories, stories, skills, and plants that they have shared with me. Hopefully someday the same will be said about me.



Zeeland, Michigan garden



All photos in this article were provided 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

MHS Membership Application

Last name: _____

First name: _____

Last name of 2nd member: _____

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Street Address:

City: _____ State: _____

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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.

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