

# The Green Hill Gossip

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\$5.00 | 919-309-0649  
email: HostaBob@gmail.com

## Back to hosta basics

By Bob Solberg

I remember way back in the last century when the most frequently asked question I heard from gardeners was, "What's a hosta?" Rick Thompson even printed up T-shirts with that scrolled all over the front of them in several colors. Well, we are well into the next century and most folks know what a hosta is and unfortunately many consider them "deer candy." These days they ask, "How big does it get?" Before we get into that, however, let's get back to basics, what else do we just assume all gardeners know about hostas?

As a quick aside, I am famous or infamous for these asides depending on your point of view, I believe language is the basis for all learning. Every subject in college, every new hobby you might try, the sports for which we live and die, and yes even hosta growing have their own vocabulary. Gardeners new to hostas bring with them the knowledge of what a leaf is and what it does for the plant as well as what roots and flowers do. They may not however know the term scape, flower scape, and often need to ask. In reality, most of us are still not sure what a hosta crown is and are those shoots, eyes, or divisions that emerge from the buds on that fleshy mass?

Vocabulary is the basis of language but learning a lot of French words does not mean you can understand a Frenchman. There are concepts that underlie our knowledge of hostas that are maybe more important to learn than whether hosta flowers have petals or tepals. Understanding both form and function are important. Most all of you can understand hosta speak well enough to collect hostas and talk about your favorites with other hosta folks; but what exactly do we think we know?

**Name.** Let's start at the very basic level. The correct common and horticultural name for a hosta is well, hosta. The plural is hostas, not also hosta. The genus (botanical) name is *Hosta*. Hosta cultivars are written with a single

quote and not in italic, 'Guacamole' or *Hosta* 'Guacamole.' Members of the American Hosta Society call it "The Friendship Plant" because of the great hosta friends we gain when we share the plant with other gardeners. Hostas are also sometimes called plantain lilies or even plantation lilies but hosta is preferred, at least by me.

**Life cycle.** As mammals we have one shot at life but



*Hosta* 'Ruby Earrings'

hostas get a fresh start every spring. All winter they are completely dormant, asleep, and do not even make any root growth like other perennial plants do. In spring new shoots emerge from their dormant buds and leaves appear. These are usually the largest leaves of the season, unless the hosta is a juvenile nursery plant. As their leaves harden off about three weeks later new roots emerge from the new shoots above last year's roots, toward the surface of the ground. Some hostas like *Hosta sieboldiana* types only make this

first flush of 3-4 leaves but others especially fragrant-flowered hostas may make four or more new sets of leaves all followed by new roots.

The purpose in life for a hosta is to make seeds. In summer if the conditions are right, the growing hosta shoot that has been making new leaves stops making leaves and produces a flowering scape, usually but not always one per shoot. Its growing bud is sent skyward on the tip of the flowering scape, the stalk that holds the hosta flowers. Flowers are open for just one day, like daylilies, (some may remain open a couple of days for late flowering species in the fall) with the youngest flowers at the top of the scape. Cutting off these flowering scapes when they appear will not encourage this shoot to make more leaves since the growing bud, now at the top of the scape, has just been removed with the flowers.

Most hosta flowers, (except *Hosta plantaginea* whose large white fragrant flowers open at night when bees do not fly), are bee pollinated. Hummingbirds are attracted to hosta flowers also but are not primary pollinators. If fertile and pollinated, hosta flowers will produce a seed pod that is visible in two or three days. Seeds take 6-8 weeks to mature. The hosta seed is black with a plump seed and a single wing. In fall the pods will dehisce, spring open, allowing the seeds to scatter to the ground, helicoptering in the breeze. If not collected hosta seeds, if the conditions are right, will germinate the following spring usually near the base of the hosta that produced them.

As hostas are finishing their blooming period they begin to produce buds at the base of the shoot. Frequently these will be large noticeable "eyes" that will not emerge until the next spring but in some hostas these buds may emerge in late summer and make a second set of shoots and repeat the entire life cycle including blooming in the same

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## Thoughts off the top of my head

**Editor's note:** Every issue of the "Gossip Jr." has the cover article "Thoughts off the top of my head." It could be about anything maybe not even hosta related. Since this issue of *The Green Gossip* doubles as the "Gossip Jr." it is only right that you should share some of the craziness that rattles around between my ears. Hope you enjoy it.

Sometimes things just rock along. They rock us to sleep. Things never seem to change, at least not dramatically because we all have a failsafe plan. But then even when you know it is coming, sometimes it is hard to hit that curveball.

Times do change but they stay the same, too. Do not get me wrong, this is not thoughts about the pandemic, the election, or social change. It is about what everyone faces regardless of how and where you live. We all have a clock, really a kitchen timer, implanted in our chests. At some point in life we all have to deal with our mortality even if we still feel superhuman. Open heart surgery will do that to you. For me it reset the timer for many years but it is still life changing.

Mark Zilis is one my closest friends in the world even though he lives 1000 miles away in his own bubble. We have known each other for the better part of 40 years. That must mean we are getting old but it never seems that way when we are together. Yes, we both have grandkids now but both us are still coaching young adults, he at cross country and me in the nursery. (See Erin's article.) Part of us still thinks our best years are still ahead.

I have always been interested in the past and how it dovetails with the present. That is why the only position in the AHS I really coveted was Historian. I am very happy to say that I am now following in the footsteps of George Schmid as AHS Historian. This fall on a Saturday in October, properly socially distanced, I met with George's son Siegfried and I not only acquired his archives for the AHS but for an hour and a half we shared the greatness of a very special person. When you look back at all we do over a long lifetime, I am always amazed at all we have accomplished. Humans are over-achievers, George especially.

Like I said, I have always been interested in the past, but some late nights I wonder, does anyone else, except for maybe Zilis, find it as fascinating. If I opened a hosta

museum with a billboard on the Interstate would anyone stop by? I wonder. Who might like to see Alex Summer's collection book in his own handwriting? Who would think it was cool to see George's galley proofs for his famous hosta book? How about Peter Ruh's classic letters with handwritten thoughts in the margins of both sides of the page?

Maybe you are more interested in revisiting the famous hosta gardens of the past in their prime? I hope so. To this end the AHS is beginning the Historic Garden Project. We are just in the beginning stages of this new endeavor and still trying to find the best way to preserve and present what we gather to the gardening public. Any suggestions are most welcome. Seriously, I need your input.

So the question becomes, even if we care about the hosta past in the present as I do, will anyone care in the future? Will someone come out of academia or the woodwork for that matter, to write blogs about our great hosta past? Having never known the extravagant personalities of Mildred Seaver, and Alex Summers, and the classiness of Van Wade, will our history be diluted into a dissertation investigating Hostaholics? I hope that I can make the past relevant now and maybe for a long time.

Seeds, more precisely hosta seeds. I have a confession to make, I am not a very good seed grower. Oh, I have successfully germinated hundreds of hosta seeds over the years but I do not enjoy it. And probably like

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growing season again. These hostas that “re-bloom” are usually small hostas that bloom very early in the season.

As autumn approaches after bloom time, hostas will begin to go into dormancy, some as early as August. Having made their dormant buds for next spring they will start to pull the moisture from the leaves down into the crown. You may have noticed your hostas looking wilted in late summer even though the soil is very moist, they are just going dormant. In areas with hot summers with temperatures over 90 degrees for weeks at a time, hostas may go into what I call “heat dormancy.” They just stop growing new leaves and may even refuse to flower. Seed set is also very poor in hot weather. As temperatures fall in August many hostas will produce a small leaf or two, a sign that they are growing again.

With a few hard freezes in autumn the hosta foliage will completely wilt and then become a brown, dry, shrunken shadow of its former glory. Usually there is very little of these dried hosta leaves to clean up in the spring if any. Some gardeners remove the foliage before the first hard freeze which makes clean up easier for them and does not adversely affect the already dormant hostas. Then in winter, hostas just sleep. If you dig up a hosta planted in mid-October in March, it will still be in the same position that you set it.

And so, in a way hostas are immortal, living a new chapter of an endless story every growing season. Yes, they can be eaten by an overwintering vole family or a couple of misbehaving fawns out of the sight of their mother, but every spring is just another trip around the sun for hostas and in the hands of a good gardener some might just last forever.

**Propagation.** Anyone with a sharp knife or shovel can divide a hosta. As the number of shoots increases each year so do the number of divisions. In fact, we call those shoots divisions based on the fact that they are there to be divided. Many gardeners believe that it their duty to divide off these extra plants and do it every spring. To them it is like mowing the lawn or pruning the hedge and they do it religiously and with glee. Small hostas seem to enjoy all this attention but not all hostas do. Large and giant hostas often sulk for a year or two after being divided and some never recover their original size. Sometimes it is better to buy your neighbor a plant of that big hosta of yours she craves rather than dividing yours.

“When is the best time to divide hostas?” I am often asked. There is not one easy answer unfortunately. Again, if it is a giant hosta then maybe never. Other more accommodating hostas may be divided in spring or late summer. Traditionally, hostas have been divided as they first emerge in the spring with a shovel or sharp knife. The leaves should not be unfurled at this time. This is still commonly done with success in the North but in the South late August is probably a better time.

Remember that hostas emerge in the spring and make new leaves and then about 3 weeks later make new roots. That means in the South those new roots are just beginning in early May when temperatures often jump into the 90’s for a few days. A divided hosta with large leaves and a greatly reduced root system may suffer stress and some leaves may burn. Dividing in late August or September at least 6 weeks before the first frost when the summer heat has subsided, gives the hosta time to make new roots or lengthen the ones it has and be settled in for winter ready to look its best the next spring.

If anyone can divide a hosta, then propagation by tissue culture, on the other hand, is for only the brave few. I have learned through the years it is probably more art than method. It is basically the same process

as division in the garden just done on a micro scale in sterile conditions, in a test tube. Ratios of plant hormones, plant growth regulators, are varied throughout the different stages of the process allowing for a hosta to be “divided” every 4-6 weeks as opposed to every year or two by conventional division.

In Stage 1 a conventional division of the hosta is brought into the lab. The leaves and roots are removed and then the growing buds, the meristems, are removed and dissected down to very small pieces of tissue, explants. These are put in test tubes keeping everything sterile, (sterile procedure), on a gelatin like media, agar, with nutrients and hormones and then you wait. It may take several months or even longer, but a shoot will appear from the piece of tissue, a tiny hosta with tiny leaves. It is sort of like magic.

At some point these shoots are then transferred to multiplying media Stage 2, where the plants will make shoots but no roots. These plants then make more shoots and are divided every 4-6 weeks. When the needed number of plants has been produced, they will be placed in rooting jars with new rooting media for 4 weeks or more and the shoots will grow roots again, Stage 3.

Then in my case they are then sent to me wrapped in a moist paper towel in a sealed plastic bag overnight. My job then is to acclimate these little baby hostas to the real world. Up to this point they have been feed a steady diet of sugar in 100% humidity. They must now start to live on their own. This acclimation process is Stage 4.

The little hostas with roots are planted into cell packs, 96 per flat, filled with a potting mix of peat and perlite. They are then put into a tent covered mist bed for 2-3 weeks where they will usually make new leaves and true roots. They remain in the greenhouse but out of the tent for another 4-6 weeks and then they are put into a plastic covered hoop house until shipped or potted.

As you can see tissue culturing a hosta is a long, multi-step process. It is also expensive and one reason hostas cost more than other perennials propagated by seed or cuttings. From the time I send a hosta division to the lab for propagation until the time I can sell it to other nurseries and hosta collectors is usually two to three years in total.

**Culture.** Remember, the purpose in life for a hosta is to make seeds. If your hostas do not bloom, then they are unhappy hostas! So, as gardeners we want to give our hostas the best possible growing conditions so they can maximum their potential and flourish for years and years. What the perfect hosta environment is in my garden, however, may not be the same in yours. Let’s look at the four factors that we can control to make our hostas as happy as possible, light, water, nutrition, and soil.

Light is the most variable of these environmental factors across the country and the least we can do anything about. We all know that sunlight is more intense in lower latitudes than in higher latitudes in the summer and summer temperatures may be in the 90’s for weeks in the South whereas only a hand full of days north of Interstate 80.

Hostas prefer periods of bright light rather than complete shade but hot afternoon sun may burn their handsome leaves. Morning sun is best or dappled shade, especially in the South. I have visited many Northern gardens where hostas are in full sun most of the day. The plants make tight mounds with a large number of shoots, smaller “sun leaves”, and usually bloom profusely. The leaves also burn along the edges if a heat wave hits in mid-summer. Shade grown hostas have larger, but fewer leaves than those grown in the sun and increase more slowly. If given enough light they too will bloom but may not in deep shade. The trick is to find the happy medium between sun and shade to maximize your hostas happiness and avoid hot sun!

Shade is usually provided by large and small trees in the garden. Again, a dappled



**Hosta ‘Dahlonaga’**

shade is best, a period of bright light flowed by a period of shade. In this way the leaves never get too hot, they are given a cooling off period, and rarely burn. Unfortunately, trees come with tree roots that not only compete for water and nutrients with hostas but some trees like maples will also strangle hostas filling the soil with their roots.

Tree selection is important if you are adding shade to your garden but if you have a wooded garden to begin with then selecting the correct trees to remove is equally important. Although they provide cooling shade, unfortunately trees are not our friends in growing hostas. Wooded gardens constantly become shadier and tree pruning or better yet tree removal (root removal), is necessary to keep that dappled shade. Hosta gardens get “rootier” and hosta beds may need to be reworked 4-5 years after being established.

Hostas need the most water in spring when they are making new leaves, remember their life cycle. Think of them as leafy balloons, in a wet spring they will become completely inflated but in a dry spring maybe only half their potential size. In summer when they are flowering, they need less water just enough to keep them moist and in autumn they need little or no supplemental water unless there is a drought, so common in October in North Carolina.

What Mother Nature does not provide them the hosta gardener must supply. Overhead watering, the easiest way to throw lots of water on hosta beds in an evenly distributed way, has been given a bad rap. Many hosta growers think that this type of watering will remove the white wax from hosta leaves that makes them blue. While it may damage a leaf slightly, so it is not show quality, the damage is minimal in my nursery where all we do is overhead water. In fact, it is usually high temperatures that melt the wax, and this happens to occur about the same time that mature hosta leaves stop making the wax. With the wax not replenished, blue hostas turn to green.

Hostas need to be fertilized! We all know that hostas cook for themselves but hosta growers must go to the store for them and fill the pantry. Nitrogen and magnesium are the two most important nutrients in making hosta leaves. Magnesium is necessary for the production of chlorophyll, which not only is needed for food, (sugar), production but also that rich green color of healthy hosta leaves.

Like water, make sure the pantry is full when the hostas emerge. Heavy fertilization is needed in the spring to maximize leaf growth. A slow release fertilizer with a high “N” number in the upper teens, (nitrogen, the first of the three numbers on the formu-

lation), should be applied just before the hostas emerge. (This is a good time to use slug bait if necessary, also.) Depending on the fertilizer and your latitude, one application should probably be enough as hostas do not need to heavy fertilization in hot weather.

I like also applying a supplemental foliar feeding of my hostas in late spring. After the first leaves harden off, spray the leaves with a liquid fertilizer solution again with an “N” number in the high teens and added magnesium. Just get the foliage wet in the evening and repeat two times, two weeks apart. Then stand back, you will see the difference in leaf size in just a couple of days. Caution, you may not want to try this on your miniature hostas.

Hostas divided in August or those starting to grow coming out of heat dormancy might like a little fertilizer at that time. By then the pantry is probably empty and a little boost will help them into winter. You can use liquid fertilizer or maybe a little 10-10-10 at this time and save that expensive slow release stuff for spring.

Then there is soil. Here is the tough one to generalize about. Building good garden soil is very important but everyone starts with different soil. Even if you import it to build beds each load will vary some, there are great loads of dirt and there are “wish they were better” loads of dirt. The soil while it does supply some nutrients of various degrees, it’s primarily is a medium for roots to grow and have access to water. Thus, any good soil must allow rainwater or water provided from irrigation to penetrate easily through the root zone of hostas about the depth of a shovel blade.

Organic matter, compost, peat moss, pine bark, etc., is usually added to garden soil to open it up and allow good water penetration as well as retain some of that water in the root zone. Usually about 3 inches of this organic matter is added to raw soil and then one inch of compost is added each year following. I like using pine bark since it does not break down as fast as compost or peat moss especially in hot climates. Grit, very small gravel, may also be added to create more permanent drainage in special beds made for miniature hostas and may also to deter vole damage.

Sometimes creating the perfect soil mix is best achieved by growing hostas in containers. In zones 7-9 where winter protection is not necessary and difficult soils filled with aggressive tree roots are problem, container grown hostas have now become the norm. There are now entire very attractive hosta gardens are container only, the containers adding not only a refuge from tree roots and

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voles but also adding height to the hosta clumps themselves that are normally shorter than plants grown in the North because of latitude alone.

Plastic pots are preferred because they hold the moisture better than terracotta pots and can be hidden inside fancy ceramic containers protecting both plant and pot. A potting mix of peat moss, perlite, and pine bark seems to work best, (tree and shrub mix if you buy it in a bag), with the amount of peat varied to coincide with the gardener's watering habits. Frequent watering, less peat and more bark is best, less watering more peat. Hostas are pretty accommodating as long as they do not get extremely dry. Add a little slow release fertilizer and then place the hosta in the best spot in the garden for that cultivar. If you guess wrong you can always pick up the pot and move it, no digging necessary. Miniature hostas make perfect pot plants in shallow bowls or hypertufa troughs.

Finally, not all hostas are created equal. Hosta growers have been trying for decades to generalize about the growing conditions for the different colors of hostas. While some of these "rules" may have applied more strictly before the incredible wave of hosta hybridizing in the past 20 years, some of the general concepts still hold. First, most all green hostas are relatively easy to grow. Some are fast and some are very slow to increase but yes, put them in too much light or not enough and they will still emerge faithfully every spring.

Blue hostas are thought to demand shade. Again, blue hostas will generally prosper in shade, for after all they are just green hostas that make white wax. But many blue hostas will produce even more wax and be bluer when give them some strong light even in the afternoon. While *Hosta sieboldiana* types still maximize their beauty in part shade, newer hybrids like 'Halcyon' will perform very well in strong light even in the South.

Yellow, or gold, hostas are thought to need more light. Yes, they do need more light, they have half the chlorophyll making machinery of green hostas but many yellow hostas are really blue hostas genetically and burn in the hot sun. Other newer yellow hostas will bleach to white in a sunny garden and are really hybridized to stay yellow in the shade. There is no easy answer with yellow hostas so when in doubt just ask your friendly local hosta grower.

White-margined hostas grow pretty much like green hostas but if placed in hot

sun their leaf edges might burn. Generally, they are easy to grow. On the other hand, white-centered hostas, while beautiful are not easy to grow. Those that emerge white-centered and then fade to greenish-white are usually dependable in morning sun but those that emerge yellow-centered and become white may melt in summer's heat. Yes, they too need more light because of their lack of green tissue and may be good candidates for pot culture where they can be moved easily to a more favorable spot if necessary. They need a little extra liquid fertilizer too. Remember, if you have trouble growing white-centered hostas, it is not your fault we all do. Just blame it on the plant!

**Pests:** I will make this short and sweet. Yes, deer love to eat hostas, so you need to build a fence, leave your dog outside at night, or spray deer repellent maybe 3 times a year. Sometimes the deer will get a little nibble here and there but mostly you will win this war.

Voles are a problem, too, especially in the fall and winter. They like to spend the winter belly up under your biggest and best hostas when you are not in the garden. So, find their holes and trap or poison them in late summer or fall. Also sneak out when the snow melts, if you have snow, and check for fresh holes then. They can have four generations of babies over the winter, just do the math.

Everything else is fairly easily managed. Treat for slugs in hotspots where you have problems in late winter before the hostas emerge. Slugs are out and about long before the first hosta shoots are poking up. Hosta Virus X is not near the problem we feared. Just remove the infected hostas from the garden and trash them. The virus does not spread aggressively if at all in a garden setting. Also, be a smart shopper, do not buy infected hostas. The symptoms are obvious in the spring when you are out hosta collecting.

Finally, unlike the virus, foliar nematodes spread through the garden very quickly. Unfortunately, we have lost this war, they are almost everywhere. Our nursery can and will sell you hostas free of the nematodes but if you have them in your garden, they will soon spread to those new hostas too. The total quarantined hosta life that I lead is no fun for collectors. I cannot trade hostas, buy them from any and all sources, or go to auctions. So, I suggest you just live with them. Hostas are supposed to be fun! You can remove the worst leaves in summer if they begin to give you that icky feeling you get in your stomach when you see them in someone else's garden. Fortunately, they will not affect the plants very much if at all. They are very well accom-

plished parasites.

**Diversity:** New hostas come about in two very different ways, from seeds and sports. Seeds are produced by the pollination of bees, these are "open pollinated," or by the hand crosses of humans. All seedlings are the result of sexual reproduction, (except in the case of *Hosta ventricosa*), and are genetically unique just like human babies. Hybridizing hostas of widely different backgrounds can produce completely new genetic combinations and dramatically new plants.

Hosta sports or mutations are the result of asexual changes, rearrangements of chloroplasts and/or tissues, within the plant and the genetic changes usually only occur in one or very few genes while most all the other characteristics of the plant remain the same. Leaf color changes are the most common sports we notice although recently many tetraploid forms have been found with four sets of chromosomes instead of the usual two. While many hosta sports appear during the tissue culture process a very few have been induced intentionally by humans but most "naturally" arise. Interestingly, hostas have the ability to change their own colors and are very good at it.

There are maybe 10 or 12 thousand named hostas and hundreds more that have "garden" or "pet" names. No, you cannot get them all! There is an International Registration Authority for hostas that records these names and limits the use of one name to just one hosta. You can view the Hosta Treasury at [HostaRegistrar.org](http://HostaRegistrar.org).

Hostas owe much of their popularity to the clever names they have been given by their originators so much so that hostas are often collected for their names alone. Of course, there are hostas named for people like the famous 'Frances Williams.' Food names beginning with the introduction of 'Guacamole' have become very popular, as well as some somewhat risqué names like 'Striptease.' There are series of names like Mary Chastain's famous "Lakeside" hostas making them highly collectable. Part of the fun of hostas is their names, none better than 'Sum and Substance' and 'Blue Mouse Ears' that have become household names.

Imagine any clump size or leaf shape, and then leaf color, yellow, blue, green, white and yes red, purple and even orange and there is a hosta that probably fits that description. Some mature hostas will fit in the palm of your hand while others measure almost four feet high and ten feet in across. Some leaves are larger than dinner plates and almost round while others are small as your little finger, very narrow with wavy leaf margins. I think to get a representative collection of all the colors and leaf shapes

you would need to find enough garden space for 600 different plants or more. Happy hunting.

**Hosta Nursery Business.** Your first hosta might have come as a gift from a gardening friend but buying hostas is really easy, too easy. As a result, hostas are the number one selling herbaceous perennial in the country and by an order of magnitude. Some of this is because they are expensive but in fact it is because people love them. I hear it all the time, "I just love hostas." Because of this hostas can be found almost anywhere plants are sold.

That said, there are well over three thousand different hostas available in the country today. Obviously, you will not find them all at your corner garden center or home improvement center. And not all of them will be perfect for you. Many are very similar, some are beautiful but hard to grow, some have prices beyond your budget, and some just do not appeal to your taste in hostas. So, what are you to do? Buy what you like.

Hostas prices can range from as little as \$1.00 each in quantity, to \$500 each or more. Auction prices have been seen bids reach several thousand dollars for a single rare plant. I suggest you do not buy either your grandmother's old hostas for a dollar each or the pride of a leading hosta hybridizer at the other end of the price scale. There are hundreds and hundreds of interesting hostas priced from \$15 to \$25 each. Work your way up to the \$50-dollar hostas when you find one that totally takes your breath away. Have fun with this, it is not a competition, buy what you like.

You can buy hostas on the Internet, (we have a website, who doesn't?) or through a Facebook group. There are lots of growers and their product is of course not identical. It is much more fun to buy hostas however, when you can see them and check their leaves for substance, hostas are meant to be touched, and they like it. Hosta clubs have plant sales, hosta conventions have lots of hostas for sale at vending, and high end garden centers often have reasonably priced, very interesting hostas. Think about visiting a hosta specialist near you or one while on vacation, that one on one time with him or her might be as much fun as you can stand.

**Hostaholics?** Hosta collectors are often accused of being "hostaholics," addicted to obtaining every hosta they do not possess. Their gardens, unfairly, are often criticized for being monocultures of hundreds of hostas packed shoulder to shoulder transformed into a graveyard of metal labels in winter. It is often assumed that hosta folks

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## Thoughts ...

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many of you, if I do not like to do something, then I procrastinate, waiting until March many years before I get the seeds planted.

I have learned that fresh seeds tend to have a higher germination rate, at least with the complex crosses I make, so sowing them in October or November produces better results than waiting until March. I have also found that soaking the seeds in water overnight before planting them, a tip I got from Ed Elslager, also increases the number of seeds that sprout. And that is about it; that is about all I know about growing seeds, or care to know for that matter. I really am not a very enthusiastic seed grower.

Fortunately, for me my hosta buddy, Simpson Eason is. He pampers his hosta babies and gets the most out of them. So he grows our seeds in his basement and then I grow the seedlings at the nursery. I am very good at growing little hostas into big ones. It is the perfect tradeoff.

But this is not going to be a discussion of seeding growing techniques, this is about seeds, specifically hosta

seeds from the wilds of Japan. I am very excited about these seeds. Hosta hybridizers are used to growing large numbers of seeds and then selecting maybe only one mature plant to keep from each cross. Sometimes all the plants from a cross are discarded, none of them being what was envisioned. Culling is what makes good hostas and for that matter good hosta hybridizers.

So when I received a very generous amount of seeds from several wild populations of hostas in Japan from my friend Hiroshi Abe, my impulse was to plant them all and select any unique seedlings I might find and name them. But the ecologist in me finally overcame the hybridizer and I decided to keep all those little all green hostas and compare and contrast.

Very few humans have seen hundreds and thousands of individuals of any hosta species. Hiroshi has and I am very jealous. All hosta taxonomy, how we define and arrange hosta species, is really based on the examination of very few plants, specimens. These are sometimes but often not the most representative plant of all the populations of that species in the wild. Frequently in horticulture, they are odd balls, selected again with the hybridizer's eye for their unique characteristics. Some are the smallest of the species, some, the plants with the most veins or white leaf backs.



**Hosta 'Hide and Seek'**

# Bob's Garden Observations

**Editor's note:** *This was written for the "Gossip Jr." in the fall of 2019. As probably with yours, my hosta garden visits were limited in 2020 so I thought this might put you in the mood for 2021.*

I was fortunate again to have a summer filled with visiting great hosta gardens in 2019. Yes, I have seen a few hostas in my years and instead of just focusing on each hosta clump and its label one by one, I try now to take in the whole garden in the sweeps of vistas that have been laid out before me. I take it all in, in one big breath.

Then having captured the mood of the moment in time I search for the garden details that not only create special interest for the eye but at the same time, connect the basic elements of the garden design together. Every hosta garden has at least one special hosta to see, usually many, and at least one special little vignette to savor.

Here are some comments and observations from my recent journeys. Hopefully they will give you ideas you can incorporate into your garden, or not.

I have known several hosta people that hope someday hostas will have daylily-like flowers in a rainbow of colors. I am not so sure that's for me. What I enjoy however is seeing giant *Allium* bulbs in bloom planted behind or better yet in the center of a large hosta clump giving the appearance of the hosta having large, spherical, purple flowers on scapes three feet tall. WOW!

I love moss in the garden. A moss lawn is exquisite if not always soft to bare feet. I love large moss-covered rocks, especially around a pond but really anywhere with hostas appearing to grow out of a group of them. A border of moss along a walk usually looks unnatural and a little weedy, and moss covering the hosta beds, like it does in my garden frequently, is just too much moss. At that point it has become a wonderful little plant in the wrong place.

In many gardens I see special beds or containers just for mice, sports of 'Blue Mouse Ears'. Initially when all the plants are small it looks very cute and in balance. Over time however 'Ruffled Mouse Ears' triples in size while 'Holy Mouse Ears' shrinks away. The result is a very dysfunctional looking mouse family, with some members having outgrown the mouse nest and needing to be sent packing.

I like to see lawn in a hosta garden although I have personally experienced the struggle to keep it alive especially with heavy foot traffic. But sometimes the paths

are too narrow and sometimes there is a large expanse of grass where maybe another bed should have been added, (maybe it will be next spring). I feel the lawn must be in proportion to the hosta growing areas, there must be balance. I am sure you have seen this also.

Labels are always problematical. Either they hide under the hosta foliage or they appear placed in the middle of the clump. They are too tall for minis and too short for large hostas. I do not know the answer to this distraction in the garden, but I do want to thank you for having your hostas labeled.

While we are at it, the various metal labels generally used just do not hold up well, they are too flexible in one way or another and lose their factory shape as soon as the first visitor pulls one up and tries to replace it. The solution is not wooden stake labels with the hosta name printed on them sideways, but for visitors just to use good garden manners and keep your hands off the labels. Now the hostas you can touch all you want; they love it.

I know, tour gardens are never ready by convention time. There is always more to do. Frequently, gardeners will add a new hosta bed to the garden in the spring before their visitors arrive. I think this is great because there are often new hostas I have not seen before, but they are also immature hostas. I wish you would go ahead and crowd them together rather than spread them out to meet their mature size needs. I know it means moving them again in a year or two, but the colors work so much better when the plants are close together.

I love containers of hostas as well as other plants in the garden. Most every garden we visit now has hostas in pots, usually fancy ceramic pots. The colors of the hosta and pot can be coordinated to bring out the best in both. Some of my favorites were 'Orange Marmalade' <sup>PP16742</sup> in a solid blue pot, 'Curly Fries' in a very dark green, almost black pot and 'Autumn Frost' in an olive-green pot with white glaze dripping down the sides from the top.

Containers also add height to any hosta garden but especially those that have little change in natural elevation. Placing a hosta container on a low wall or step is very effective when seen from walking up the driveway. I have mixed feelings about these metal plant stands for pots in the garden. The pot placed on a single pole looks too much like a lollipop for me but a stand of maybe three hostas in pots can work well.

Some gardeners are now placing a pot in a pot in the ground to reduce tree root



*Hosta 'The Mighty Quinn'*

competition. Black nursery pots work fine but look like well, black nursery pots. "Don't you need to get those plants in the ground?" But brown pots with a nice lip are almost completely camouflaged when surrounded by fine brown mulch. It is amazingly attractive.

I photograph every custom constructed garden shed that I see. I do have an affection for building small buildings, and I am amazed at the detail work put into these sheds that house wheelbarrows, tools, and lawn mowers. They also make a great backdrop for the garden, stopping the eye and hiding the neighbor's hosta-less back yard. I have seen a few of these sheds that are not for storage but entertaining, complete with a guest book and refreshments. They were livable, at least in summer.

Let's spend a little time on the materials used for garden walks. In my opinion they all work well just not all the time. Like I said lawn is great as long as it is more than two lawnmower swaths wide. Hosta beds are often put in areas where grass would not grow in the first place so thinking it can be grown there now in a high traffic area might not be the best idea. Take it from me who reseeded twice a year every year and the grass looked great until the first tour group came through.

Gravel seems like a reasonable answer, but it wanders off into the beds and then disappears into the ground never to be seen again. It must be raked and replenished. It was my choice for the 2001 AHS Conven-

tion, and we put it down on Thursday and by Sunday it was no longer perfect. From then on it just became a gravel path in the woods.

Slate and field stone are rustic especially if a low ground cover is grown between the stones. But no matter how flat you get them when they are set, they somehow find a way to wobble under foot before long. Bricks are sometimes better if set in a good sand bed but tree roots from below will push them up here and there making a tripping hazard for people like me who cannot pick up their feet when they walk,

Mulch then may be what you decide upon. It is difficult to find good pathway mulch these days. Either it is dyed some unnatural black, brown, or heaven forbid red color, or it is so fresh it looks like it came right out of the Asplundh truck. All look very unnatural. Pine bark is ascetically pleasing but washes badly in afternoon thunderstorms. So, are we back to trying to grow grass? In any case I really appreciate a great garden walk when I see one.

Do fallen trees and old stumps add to the beauty of the garden or do they look like they are too big a job to remove? Yes, and no. Sometimes it works great for me but once the logs are half decayed maybe it is time to make compost out of them. However, a moss-covered log can be very attractive. I defer to the gardener's taste on this one.

Do you like "bottle trees?" You know those posts placed into the ground with

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 5**

## 2020: What Did You Miss Most?



*Hosta 'Beet Salad'*

You have heard it a million times by now, 2020 has been a crazy year. I would be remiss if I did not at least acknowledge the craziness and share my feelings and some hope for the future of not only Hostadom but all of us everywhere. There is no need to describe all the negatives, we have all been living them all year, but like I like to say, there is good and bad in everything. So, here are a few questions to ponder in our "new normal" way of life.

Now that it is autumn and the hostas are becoming brown and crispy with each glorious warm, sunny fall day, think back, what did you miss the most in your life with hostas this year? Those of us that regularly attend the AHS National Conventions certainly were sad when our registration fees were refunded. The Minnesota convention always held in a year ending in a zero will now be held in 2022. 2020 Vision, their theme, might become Hindsight 2022.

Again, what did you miss the most? Before I tell you what I missed the most, a quick aside. If you read this little newspaper regularly you knew an aside might be coming. When you first heard that Covid 19 was coming, did

you flash back to Hosta Virus X (HVX)? I have always thought that the over the top fear of HVX was rooted, as humans, in our very real fear of the flu, the common cold, and other human viruses.

Most of you, unlike me, are terrified of HVX as compared to foliar nematodes. I fear the latter much more. Humans get viruses and get sick and yes, sometimes die but few of us have worms in the 21st century. Maybe if this was 300 years ago when everyone had worms, we would fear the worms much more than unseen disease. Fortunately for hostas HVX spreads by contact and not through the air. A little hand sanitizer on your cutting tools and everything should just be fine, your hostas do not need to wear masks. Really, did you flash back?

One thing I know you did not miss was gardening. Did you get all those gardening projects that had hung around unfinished in past years completed? Did you put in a few new hosta beds? I bet your garden never looked better. Hopefully, you could show it off to a few friends, socially distancing of course.

I also know you did not miss buying hostas. The loss of vending opportunities worried me at first. Vending,

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 5**

## BOB'S GARDEN OBSERVATIONS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

wooden pegs on their sides on to which you hang a dozen or two wine bottles. I like the all blue bottle trees best, the way they catch the light with subtle color like all blue lights on a Christmas tree. I did see one once the size of a mature dogwood with several branches of bottles of all colors filling a fifteen-foot corner of a garden. It was pretty spectacular. Best of all, bottle trees do not have any nasty roots! I am determined to have one at the nursery, I just have to drink all that blue wine first.

I love flowering shrubs in the garden when they are in bloom. When they are not, they grow and spread and consume valuable hosta growing space. They also produce dense shade at their bases making the garden darker as a whole. We should be somewhat wary of flowering shrubs since they become the equivalent of trees in a small garden, but if you have the space, go for it. The spring masses of color are well worth it.

Northern gardens being sunnier than Southern gardens frequently mix hostas and conifers. I must admit that I am more than a little jealous of this. I love the mixing of textures probably more than the yellow, blue, and green colors of each that complement each other so well. Like hostas, conifers come in different sizes, but dwarf varieties can become thirty-foot trees in 15-20 years so choose wisely, mine are always larger in 10 years than advertised.

Conifers can however sometimes be unpleasant neighbors for hostas. They tend to

dry out the soil, since at least here in the South they photosynthesize year-round. Pine forests are dry forests. Spruces can be bad also, but I am sure many of you know much more about this than I do. I am lucky that I can grow Cryptomerias here and there are some wonderful dwarf ones that do well in shade. I probably should grow more.

Ferns are also great with hostas. They will flourish in those areas of the garden where tree root competition is high, and hostas suffer. They bring verticality to the garden as well as cool green non-hosta colors, light greens mostly. Yes, some ferns are invasive, so do not plant any of those. Most are well behaved and stay pretty much where you want them.

Most hosta gardeners know that ferns are a perfect foil for hostas, but they are timid about using them. They plant one fern here and one fern there or in specimen-like clumps with their own metal labels. While it is out of fashion to mass plant hostas in a hosta collectors garden, (although that border of 'Curly Fries' that greeted us as we got off the bus in Green Bay did draw a lot of attention), ferns need to be mass planted to make a statement. I like groups of 6-10 planted a foot apart or less.

Everyone seems to want evergreen ferns for their garden, yes, they may be evergreen, but they still lay on the ground in late fall with the exception of Autumn Ferns that stay upright much longer. In any case, that evergreen foliage must still be cut and removed from the garden in spring while the foliage of deciduous ferns just disappears. Try some of each in large sweeps as a backdrop for hostas.



*Hosta 'Orange Marmalade'*

Last but not least, everyone wants a pond for a hundred different reasons. I love the sound of water in the garden, and I love feeding koi. Frequently the pond is the centerpiece of a garden, but rarely do we see hostas growing in the pond; they will, you know.

I understand if you are concerned about

water quality issues, but a hosta in a container on a pond shelf or buried in the rocks of a shallow running stream will do just fine. I suggest using a fragrant-flowered hosta that makes leaves for most of the summer but try any you like. I have seen 'Sum and Substance' with wet feet in a little too much sun but it was pretty happy. ♥

## BACK TO HOSTA BASICS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

only have eyes for hostas and have little or no knowledge of other plant groups or for that matter garden design. Ironically, most of these critics know little about hostas.

Yes, hosta gardeners love their hostas and bond with them in a very special way. Hostas have always been precious especially in the days before tissue culture but still are today. Hosta growers frequently find that they eventually begin to run out of gardening real estate but still they never get rid of a hosta. They may divide their plants and

share most of the clump with a friend, but they always keep a piece for themselves. Hostas are that special.

I believe that there is also a spiritual connection between hostas and humans. Growing hostas means centering our life cycle around theirs. There is no more exciting time in the year than when the hostas begin to emerge from their long winter's nap. We run into the garden several times a day to check their progress and count the new shoots. It's hosta time again! We revel in their beauty as they make perfect, fresh leaves again and we cover them with blankets if a late frost threatens that new soft foliage. We pamper them with new mulch and products with names like "Miracle-Gro" and "Superthrive". We amass water bills so huge during the droughts of summer that the water authority comes out to check for broken water pipes.

Then by August the hostas are looking a little hot and tired and we too as gardeners

share the fatigue of the long gardening season, of lugging hoses and pulling weeds. Both hosta and human begin to long for colder weather and maybe even snow. Winter brings a welcome physical break from the hosta garden, but December will bring the new hosta listings and we will start making wish lists of new purchases to consider and maybe even order a few new hostas early to get free shipping. Then spring arrives again and a new hosta garden will emerge magically from the old tired one of last fall. And it is hosta time again!

No, this is not an addiction, it is a love affair. We love our hostas and they seem to love us too. Their lives have merged with our lives and life is the better for all of us. We share their joys and sorrows and they give us serenity from this crazy high-tech world. A hosta garden is a place of calm and peace. Hostas are magical plants and they have made many people I know very happy. Me, too.



*Hosta 'Great White Whale'*

## 2020: WHAT DID YOU MISS MOST?, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

bringing hostas to you, is a big part of our business. But you all took to mail ordering hostas with great enthusiasm, maybe for some of you for the first time ever. As the country rediscovered the joys of gardening, hostas led the way. Yes, our retail receipts increased but our wholesale sales went through the roof as our customers ran through their inventories early in the spring. The pandemic helped revive interest in hostas as the great shade plants that they are, and that's a good thing.

Many of you are new customers, some just starting with hostas. I know they are starting to look pretty bad right now but just wait until next spring. They will emerge fresh, every leaf perfect, larger in size than when they went to sleep and they will fill you with uncontrollable excitement. Spring is the best time of the year in Hostadom. Remember to give them some fertilizer and keep them wet all spring and they will reward you with a summer of

viewing pleasure.

The hosta is called fondly the Friendship Plant. We say you come first for the plant but come back for the people. Hosta people are some of the finest people on the planet. So, which did you miss more, the plant or the people? I should leave a little blank space here so you can fill in the blank with your answer. Both is not an acceptable answer!

For me, conventions are mostly a blur. Lots of faces from lots of places and very little one on one time. Most of the other attendees have lots of quality time with their new and longtime friends. So, your answer may be a little different for mine. I usually see my hosta friends when I travel to give talks to their clubs or to an event like we had even this July at Josh Spece's In the Country Garden and Gifts. These overnight stays give me much more time to talk hostas than those stolen moments at the National Convention.

I did miss giving those talks this year, especially this September and October when I usually have my "fall tour" of several talks in a week or less. That is when I get to meet folks just beginning their hosta adventures and I

try to help them on their way. I missed being on the road, too. I did manage to see the country from North Carolina to Iowa this year, staying in more expensive hotels than I am used to and eating takeout on the tailgate of the truck.

So yes, I missed the people, but I missed seeing hostas more! I love visiting hosta hybridizers and seeing their new seedlings. I can do it for hours, long after my traveling companions are ready to move on down the road. After nearly 40 years, hostas still excite me. Sometimes it is the sheer size of the plants. Sometimes it is an unusual color of blue or yellow. Now more and more often it is a purple scape with variegated bracts or a late flowering *H. longipes* hybrid with almost blue flowers. I think I am getting hooked on hosta flowers and the best ones are in August and September, when I have a little more time to enjoy them in the evening.

So, what did you miss the most this year? And what plans do you have already for next year when things get better? Stay in touch with your hosta friends this winter, they need to hear from you. And dream of the hostas you will discover next spring, untouched by the pandemic.

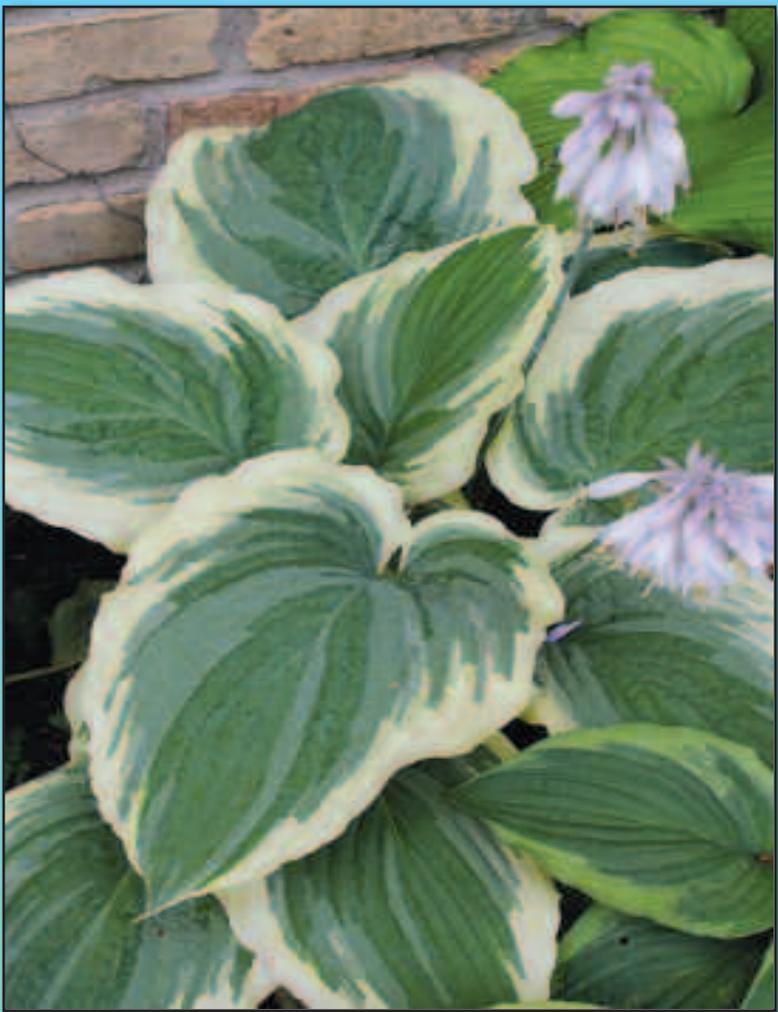
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# The Top 15 Hostas of 2020 (and ties!)



*Hosta 'First Blush'*



*Hosta 'Wildest Dreams'*



*Hosta 'Kaleidochrome'*



Since we are publishing the “Green Hill Gossip” so late this year, due to a number of factors beyond my control, I thought it might be fun to let you know what were the 15 most popular hostas for our retail customers this year. This is somewhat of a measure of which hostas hosta collectors most sought this year but there are also factors like price and how long they have been on the market. Our newest hostas are year in and year out usually our best sellers, especially the most expensive ones, if you can believe that.

So here is the list of the top 15 plus ties. They accounted for over half of our Retail Mail Order Sales. They are listed in order of number of plants sold, not dollar value, largest to smallest.

1. ‘First Blush’<sup>PP28,920</sup>
2. ‘Lettuce Wrap’
3. ‘Wildest Dreams’
4. ‘Lemon Snap’
5. ‘Gabriel’s Wing’
6. ‘Kaleidochrome’
7. ‘Jane’s Blush’
8. ‘Mouse on the Moon’
9. ‘Yippee’
10. ‘Twice as Nice’
11. ‘Orange Marmalade’<sup>PP16,742</sup>
12. ‘Beet Salad’
13. ‘The Mighty Quinn’
14. ‘Dahlongega’
15. ‘Hide and Seek’
15. ‘Great White Whale’

Now for the analysis, that is why you enjoy this little newspaper after all. Surprisingly, ‘First Blush’<sup>PP28,920</sup> in its sixth year of introduction was our number one seller by a fairly wide margin. I thought you all had that one by now but evidently not. Our wholesale customers sold out quickly also this year and keep begging for more. Either we and/or the nurseries to which we supply it got a host of new customers this year or a photo of the plant was mysteriously circulated on the Internet. Both are probably true.

Our best new hostas ‘Lettuce Wrap’ and ‘Wildest Dreams’ were second and third which is usually the case. We normally sell more of our newest plants than older ones. ‘Lemon Snap’ has been a huge sensation and I am not quite sure why. We still sell all we produce every year retail and wholesale.

‘Gabriel’s Wing,’ while not the only variegated sport of ‘Empress Wu’<sup>PP20,774</sup> has sold very well for us. I think its bright yellow margin is very good. I am very happy for Don Rawson that his plant has been so successful. ‘Kaleidochrome’ and ‘Jane’s Blush’ both have gimmicks. The former is streaked bright yellow and green and the latter blushes purple in early spring. Both are kind of weird plants, you know what I mean if you grow them, but proved very popular.

Then two of our minis come next, ‘Mouse on the Moon’ and surprisingly ‘Yippee.’ I was beginning to think that the miniature hosta craze was slowing down, and collectors were choosing a few huge hostas over a bed full of minis. This summer has proven that the enthusiasm for minis is still there, but price is a real consideration with them. Collectors will just pay more for a giant hosta and that is probably why ‘Hide and Seek’ at \$55.00 fell to 15<sup>th</sup> place.

‘Twice as Nice’ in its second year was followed by two old standards, ‘Orange Marmalade’<sup>PP16,742</sup> and ‘Beet Salad.’ I do not know what the fascination is with ‘Beet Salad,’ why have that hosta when you can have its child ‘First Blush’<sup>PP28,920</sup>? Maybe it is the catchy “food” name or its bright red petioles and scape. Maybe you just need both.

Three more new hostas round out the list. ‘The Mighty Quinn’ got a late start in 2020 and was not in our 2020 Preview, held out for marketing purposes. Did you get the post card with its fabulous photo on it? ‘Dahlongega’ and ‘Great White Whale’ both sold very well as new introductions for 2020.

So, what is coming in 2021? Well, we have several new hostas to tantalize you as well as some of our first introductions from my trip to Japan with Mark Zilis and his son Andy a couple of years ago. These are exciting times at Green Hill Farm, so check our website in late December and see what is ready to send your way. And read on...



*Hosta 'Jane's Blush'*





*Hosta 'Lettuce Wrap'*



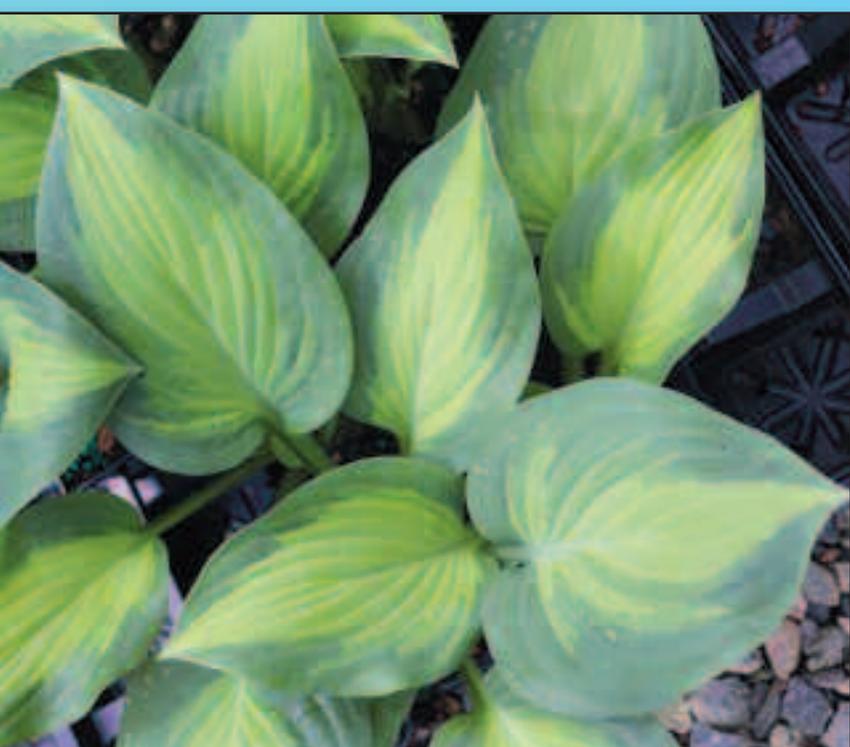
*Hosta 'Lemon Snap'*



*Hosta 'Bear Necessities'*



*Hosta 'Gabriel's Wing'*



*Hosta 'Twice As Nice'*



*Hosta 'Yippee'*

# *H. plantaginea*, the forgotten hosta

We all know *Hosta plantaginea* well, even if we are never quite sure how to correctly pronounce its name. We can easily recognize its very shiny, somewhat blunt leaves that seem to be paper-thin to the eye but more rubbery to the touch. And of course, there are those wonderful huge white fragrant flowers that fill our August evenings with the sweet scent that reminds me of the orange blossoms of my childhood.

I wonder, how many of you still have a plant or two of the old August Lily? *H. plantaginea* was the first hosta to make its way to Europe in the 1780's and was in this country before 1812. (I once knew of a clump that had been passed down for generations that was a wedding present in that year here in North Carolina.) Seeds not plants were sent and the hosta was continued to be propagated by seed, so we find several forms of the species varying in leaf color and flower size. George Schmid describes them all in detail in his discussion of the species now found on-line at the Hosta Library. (1)

The uniqueness of *H. plantaginea* goes well beyond its being the only fragrant-flowered hosta species. As a matter of fact, if you were to take all the hosta species and divide them into two groups based on similarities, *H. plantaginea* would be in one group by itself and all the other species together would be in the other. Evolutionarily, it is thought to be derived from the most ancient of hostas, a relic from times far past. (1)

Unfortunately, this relic may have seen its time growing in the wilds of China come to an end. While listed in the Flora of China as being once found in forests,

grassy slopes, and rocky places; near sea level to 2200 m in the provinces of southern and southeastern China, (2) Maekawa was unable to locate any natural populations in his 1940 monograph of the genus. (1) In any case, these areas would be the most tropical habitat for any hosta species.

In fact, it has been shown that *H. plantaginea* does not need a cold dormancy like other hostas do of 3-6 weeks at 35-40 degrees F. (3) Based on its natural



*H. plantaginea* 'Double Up'

habitat this would make good sense. In fact, I had a plant of *H. plantaginea* 'Parthenon' by my kitchen sink for over a year. It finally went to sleep but came back up bigger and better in a month. You may

want to try one as a houseplant!

Speaking of emerging after dormancy, did you know that *H. plantaginea* is one of the first hostas out of the ground in the South and one of the last in the North? (4) I believe that the apical bud freezes and is damaged where soils are frozen for long periods in the winter or when they might start to grow during a warm spell in mid-winter and then the cold and frozen ground return. In any case, in the South the apical

requirements for growing plants of *H. plantaginea* are not stringent, and they need little sunshine and appropriate temperatures. (2) This might surprise you as we tend to think of *H. plantaginea* as not only being sun tolerant but needing bright light to prosper. Another study found however that *H. plantaginea* 'Aphrodite' actually had higher photosynthetic rates when grown under 70% shade as opposed to 50% shade. (5)

All these things make *H. plantaginea* different from other hostas, but it is really the flowers that are the most unique part of the plant. First, they are huge! They are not designed for bee pollination, a bee could get lost inside those big trumpets. There are no purple stripes to attract and maybe guide the bees to the nectar. We always thought that the flowers were pure white. George Schmid hinted that sometimes they may have a little purple color to them and sure enough, science has shown that there are actually small amounts of two anthocyanins in *H. plantaginea* var. *pleno* (a double-flowered form) (6).

It is the fragrance however that makes *H. plantaginea* such a great ornamental plant and has saved it from extinction. As the only night blooming hosta, moths, not bees, are probably the focus of their affection. Many of the closely related agaves are moth pollinated it turns out.

The flowers open at about 8:00 PM, just before dark in August and stay open all night into the next early afternoon. I like to pollinate them in twilight with pollen saved from the morning. Warm, muggy nights make for good seed set but even that is not a sure bet. *H. plantaginea* can be reluctant to set seed and then even when it does many of the seeds are sterile.

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## My Favorite Hosta Things

**Editor's note:** This was written as part of the "Gossip Jr." in 2019. I thought it might be fun for you to know what I like most about hostas and maybe what we no longer take for granted in 2020.

Let's list our favorite things about hostas. I think both clerics and psychologists would think this is good for our hosta souls. I thought about ranking them in order but for me it is impossible. Besides, this should come from the heart and not be too analytical, more right brain.

For me each year with hostas is part of an annual cycle; a cycle that mimics the life of a hosta. It begins in spring seeing the hostas excitedly poke their "eyes" through the mulch and ends in the fall as they and all the world prepares for shorter days and maybe a long winter's nap. Yes, my life revolves around hostas. I share their joys and sorrows; and they continue to fascinate me day after day. Here are my favorite hosta things.

Watching them emerge in spring. There is nothing better in all of Hostadom than those glorious spring days when the hostas almost miraculously come back to life. It all happens so quickly. First a few shoots emerge in a warm sunny spot in the garden and then in a matter of days they are popping up everywhere. I, like you, cannot contain myself and am forced out into the garden two, three, maybe four times a day to observe their progress. How many divisions are there this year, how much of an increase? This is why we collect hostas, for days like these.

**Business.** I may lose some of you here, but my garden is really my nursery. I love being in the hosta business and have stuck with it for almost 40 years now despite being given lots of good reasons to quit by some of the people closest to me. I enjoy

business, thinking of new marketing innovations, like exclusive hosta club plants, and producing "The Green Hill Gossip". I like that hostas have made me a good living and put my four kids through college and private school. We make a good team.

I love taking my employees out to lunch. We call it "company lunch", and it is a regularly scheduled event on an employee's birthday or her last day of work in the summer. It can also be just when Bob feels like it. Hostas are supposed to be fun and going out to lunch is part of that fun.

I never thought I would say this, but I really like growing hosta liners. They are just the cutest little babies, almost premature when we get them from the lab. I love putting them in the "incubator" so that they can adapt to the real world. I also love shipping days at the nursery. Shipping takes precedence over everything else including phone calls for a few days a week. I can simplify my life and be just one dimensional.

However, the very best thing about being in the hosta business is the nursery at the end of the day. All the employees are gone, and I am alone with my thoughts in the little hosta world that I have built over so many years. It is quiet, and I have no place to go. I am home.

**Hosta College.** If I had to pick just one event in all of Hostadom to attend, it would be Hosta College. If you have never been, go! I wish it were two days of classes instead of just one. It is at the beginning of hosta time for me and my business in North Carolina, and it gets me fired up for the upcoming craziness of the next four months. I love seeing the people, teaching as many classes as I can, and showing off our newest hostas for the first time. Go!

**AHS Convention.** The AHS National Convention is the other bookend event, after

Hosta College, to the busiest time of the year for me and my hostas. Usually by mid-June I am a zombie and it is all I can do to drive the day or two to the convention. (Minneapolis 2020, is a 22-hour drive!) But if I am still breathing, I will be there. It is the crown jewel of Hostadom.

Exhaustion is one reason I like riding the bus at the National, it is very conducive to napping. But I also like visiting with hosta folks that I really do not know very well. We become a little community as we ride from garden to garden and learn as much about hostas as we do each other. I like seeing the gardens through someone else's eyes and learning as I answer a question or two. It is a great time for sharing.

I like getting off the bus in a Northern hosta garden first thing in the morning. The dew is still on the grass, and the hostas are stretching out to greet me, and they are so tall! While my hostas might reach the width of Northern hostas; they never achieve the height. (I think it has something to do with latitude, length of growing season, and the spot that I have chosen to live on this planet.) There is nothing more beautiful than a garden of huge hostas in every color possible.

You might not think this to hear me talk sometimes, but I really do like vending hostas at the National. I do not like all the vending hours that keep me from enjoying speakers, eating lunch, and seeing the Hosta Show, but I really do like it. At vending I am available to everyone; they know where to find me. I like that. And I like actually handing a customer a hosta new to them and see the excitement that brings. I say that some day I will not vend at the National, but I would not know what to do with myself. I belong behind that table.

**Speaking Tours.** I love playing the hosta rock star. I love speaking to hosta groups, really any group, and sharing the

"Thoughts off the Top of My Head." I want it to last all afternoon. I enjoy staying with hosta folks in their homes and getting that good one-on-one experience. I always learn something new. I also learn a lot about hosta clubs and what and how they are doing. It helps me come up with new ways that I can help.

I am famous for having lots of miles on my old trucks. I love traveling Hostadom by truck, seeing the countryside, measuring the corn. I try to take a side trip or two if I have an extra hour or so and visit someplace wild or of historical importance. I look for small museums well off the Interstate rarely visited except by local school children. Native American culture attracts me frequently these days.

I also like to visit hosta nurseries, not to buy hostas but to visit my customers. We are a wholesale nursery primarily, so I enjoy talking with other hosta growers about what works and does not work for them. We talk hostas too, and I get new ideas of what we might produce in the future. I am not really a hosta collector, but a nurseryman first.

**People.** I could go on telling stories of hosta people I have known forever, but I will make this short and sweet. Most of my closest friends are hosta people. Most of them live far away. Hostas have a way of bringing people together that is hard to explain, but you all know what I am talking about. It is the Friendship Plant after all.

I love seeing people when hostas make them smile. Hostas just seem to make us happy; and we always see the best of everyone's personality at hosta events. We all feel that too.

I had to get this in somewhere. Where there are hosta people there is always good food. Local delicacies and home cooking are

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

## H. PLANTAGINEA, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

It is thought that the plant has a dominant lethal gene that causes the sterility. (1) More sterility problems occur with hybrids of *H. plantaginea* and hostas with different species backgrounds probably because the genes are so different, but a couple of generations may be possible to produce. *H. plantaginea* pollen can be saved and used the next morning on hostas that set seed easily.

I bet you did not know that *H. plantaginea* is used as a traditional Chinese medicine. The dried whole plants, leaves, roots and flowers have been used to treat inflammatory and painful diseases in traditional Mongolian medicine. Modern pharmacology has revealed that it has steroids and flavonoids that are anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antibacterial, antifungal, anti-cancer, antioxidant and other biological activities. (2)

Well, by now I think you see that *H. plantaginea* is unique in the hosta world, almost not a hosta at all. But why did I begin this article by saying it was a forgotten hosta? Being hard to use in hybridizing is one reason. Out of the maybe 10-12,000 named hostas only 266 have fragrant flowers, (if I counted correctly), according to Don Rawson's Lists (7) and many of those are not available. Many hybridizers have set it aside. I have several times also, but I always seem to take up with her again.

The plant is also not the easiest to grow. It too likes warm muggy weather to really put on good growth. It struggles if it gets too hot and dry, dropping its first leaves from the spring. It is really best as a pot plant, but it does not overwinter well in a container. It comes up too early, or it rots in rainy years. Actually, it might be happi-

est in a pot by your kitchen sink if you leave the florescent light above it on 24 hours a day. Mine was. In the nursery we keep them dry under plastic and additionally put them under light frost cloth in the hoop house. They get the same treatment as the liners do.

Then frankly, the doubled-flower cultivars, 'Aphrodite' and 'Venus,' have been a disappointment. The increased number of flower parts seems to vary greatly in plants in the trade. Frequently the buds are so full of "petals" that even pinching the tips will not get them to unfurl. Then if you are lucky to have the first few buds open, the rest begin to rot and turn brown. Forget that!

There are three cultivars that I do grow and enjoy. 'Poseidon' has a wonderful clean white margin and 'Parthenon' has a wide dark green margin and a narrow white leaf center that does not melt out for me. Both are from 'Aphrodite' and have flower issues but their super glossy fresh new foliage in late summer is worth growing them. Oh, go ahead and cut those flowers off if you want, I do.

My favorite cultivar of all is 'Doubled Up,' a baseball term used to let you know that this plant is tetraploid. (8) I found this one in a big block of *H. plantaginea* from Q & Z Nursery in the last years that the nursery was in Chapel Hill. It corrects many of the traits we do not like about the species. It has more substance, thicker, shinier leaves, it is more compact and not as fragile, making it a better nursery plant. The scapes are shorter and the buds denser. And the flowers, oh those flowers, are single, open wide, and are the largest flowers in Hostadom. They are still very fragrant but maybe not quite as sweet. And they all open wide, everyone.

While 'Doubled Up' is a great improved replacement, I am thinking on going back to basics and sell the species again. Maybe just a few, huge clumps in



*H. plantaginea* 'Double Up' flowers

pots. The old August Lily no longer put aside, no longer forgotten. What do you think?

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## MY FAVORITE HOSTA THINGS, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

my favorites. Maybe food is the glue that holds us all together and keeps us coming back for more, just don't tell the hostas.

**Hybridizing.** I am introduced as a hosta hybridizer more often than a nurseryman and that is fine. But there are many far more enthusiastic hybridizers than me. My time to hybridize is late summer after the deluge of shipping has subsided, so I am limited in the type of crosses I can make. Fortunately, frost comes late to the Carolinas

and I can hybridize many late flowering hostas that others cannot.

One of my most favorite things is visiting other hybridizers and helping to evaluate their seedlings. Everyone of them has their own style, their own techniques, their own hosta breeding goals and almost all are different from mine. Selecting the best new hostas is a difficult task but one of the ones I find most rewarding. I am always walking that tight rope between exceptional and marketable. A great hosta must not only be beautiful and enticing, it must be a great nursery plant too. It must grow. I feel a lot of joy in finding both those characteristics in a new hosta and then bringing it to you.

I really enjoy talking hosta hybridizing

with my local hosta buddy Simpson Eason. He brings such excitement to examining each detail of every seedling we analyze. We have recently merged efforts doing what each of us does best; he germinates our seeds in his basement and I grow out the 4-5 leaf seedlings at the nursery. But it is the enthusiasm that he brings to our collaboration that is so contagious and so good for me.

Finally, I really like hosta flowers. You may belong to the school that cuts them off to the ground as soon as they appear, but up close, where hybridizers nose around, hosta flowers can be quite beautiful and varied. The late flowering ones are the more diverse group with lots of purple stripes to help lead the bees to the promised land. At my talk in

Champaign, IL the floral arrangement featured several scapes of my 'Grape Fizz' with its densely packed rich purple buds and blooms. It was a florist's delight.

With more new forms and colors of hosta flowers on the way, I cannot wait. Give them a chance, you can always use them as cut flowers in a vase on your kitchen table.

So, what is on your list? Is there something there that I left out? Maybe thinking up hosta names, or even buying new hostas. I am sure that finding new hostas to add to your garden is high on at least some of your lists of favorite hosta things. For me though, not so much.

# From The Potting Shed

By Erin Parks

Perhaps you have always thought of Bob as hosta expert, friend, or colleague. Perhaps he is the guy your club calls when you want a crowd-drawing talk. Maybe he is simply the guy whose name shows up on your Gossip that comes each year in your box of great, new hostas. Perhaps you have even begun to consider "Hosta Bob" as "Bob the Hosta Businessman." But have you ever thought what it would be like to work at Green Hill Farm for the season? Surrounded by hoop houses full of the newest hostas in the industry? Getting to learn practical hosta knowledge every day? And did I mention the discount? Because, of course someone has to help him grow and ship all of those wonderful hostas we look forward to each year. And unfortunately, there are no magic hosta fairies that step-up plants on full moons in July. So in case you are looking for your dream summer job to earn some extra pocket change, I'm going to give you a peak into what it's really like to work at Green Hill Farm.

Like some things at Green Hill Farm, our job postings mostly stay old school. If you want a chance to be in-

terviewed, keep an eye out in the local newspapers. Once you have emailed a resume to Bob and secured an interview, you'll get to drive out down some country roads in Franklinton, NC. You might be slightly worried when the GPS asks you to turn down a gravel path marked by a simple sign, "Hostas". But fear not, you are in the right place, and all of those wonderful hostas are in reach! Don't stress about the interview. I must admit, when I first started working for Bob, I had no idea what a hosta even was. There are no requirements for knowledge of hostas or nurseries as long as you are willing to learn and work hard. All training and knowledge necessary will be taught, plus much more if you're willing to learn.

So congratulations! You got the job. You are an official employee of Green Hill Farm. And your first day happens to fall on a Monday in May. Here, the words "Baptism by Fire" comes to mind. April, May and June are our crazy months. Everyone is recovering from the cold winter and cannot wait to get their hands on their hosta order, so we begin shipping like our lives depend on it. Monday mornings are always the most stressful, and everyone knows to be quiet and work as fast as they can. We work as hard as we can to undo and wrap all the

plants before lunch time. Be sure to pack enough food for lunch; you will need it! And no skipping breakfast; it is a decision you will soon regret. After lunch, we can usually breathe a little more as we pack up boxes with Bob, so they can be shipped. Just pay attention and make sure Bob never runs out of rolled newspaper!

Tuesday and Wednesday are very similar to Monday, only we are usually more relaxed as we finish our list of orders that need shipping for the week. If you are lucky, you might be able to talk Bob into going to the Mexican restaurant down the street for lunch! (Note: Please don't apply if you don't like lunch). However by Thursday it's time to learn a whole new task and take a field trip! We all pile into Bob's truck with a box full of stage three plants and head for Plantworks Nursery where we will begin "sticking" them into liner flats. I promise you'll feel slow at first, but soon you'll get the hang of it! You might even find yourself "sticking" in your dreams.

A month goes by, you survive the craziest month of the season, and it's time to celebrate with one of our favorite days at the nursery: The Memorial Day Sale. Although not a mandatory workday, you won't want to miss

# What's Next?



*Hosta 'Michigander'*



*Hosta 'Riverboat Queen'*



*Hosta 'Rough Lemon'*



*Hosta 'Out of the Fog'*



*Hosta 'Blazing Hot'*

**H**osta folks always seem to want to know what's next. They will ask me in mid-summer what new hostas we will have for sale the next spring. The unsatisfying answer is usually, "I really have no idea." It is not until now, December when Erin and I start making lists of possible new introductions for the next spring. Some will fill our Hosta Preview and others will wait until May to be ready to be shipped. It is a guessing game and a balancing act.

As most of you know, we have our own hosta hybridizing program at Green Hill Farm. We cross pollenate hosta flowers in a goal oriented way to produce new hostas that have certain characteristics we favor. I guess we are best known for our red-petioled hostas with yellow leaves but we also dabble with blue hostas with unusual forms, twisting, ruffles, and substance and hostas with fragrant flowers.

2011 we will have three new seedlings that we will offer. 'Ruby Earrings' is the first introduction from our newest generation of yellow hostas. The red color is again improved and the leaf shape is unique, deeply cupped with "ears" at the leaf base. 'Rough Lemon' is a diamond in the rough rescued from the compost pile. It has great spring color and grows faster than its siblings. The foliage could be a little more refined, less rough, but you will not be able to ignore this plant in May. 'Bluebird of Happiness' is a tetraploid seedling from 'Touch of Class'<sup>PP13,080</sup> featuring intensely blue leaves with unbelievable substance that remind of a Bird of Paradise in shape.

Our hosta liner division has become a great source of new hosta sports. Since we get our baby hostas straight from the tubes so to speak, we get all the sports too. They all must be evaluated of course but many have become nice improvements on their original parents. So we have both seedlings and sports that we name.

New this year are 'Pull of the Moon,' a 'Tidewater' sport, 'Blazing Hot,' a 'Blaze of Glory' sport, 'Avocado Toast,' a great wide margined sport of our seedling 'Lemon Snap,' and 'Pineapple Salsa,' a green-margined 'Mango Salsa.'

We also introduce plants for several other hosta hybridizers. Since we do not do any hybridizing for variegated hostas or for very large hostas, we must procure them from others. These too must be evaluated to see if they are good nursery plants, unfortunately not all are, even some green hostas are not easily grown in the nursery. I really enjoy finding great new hostas in the far corners of Hostadom and sending them to all of you over the world for the hybridizers with which we work. It is a thrill for all of us.

Here is a sampling of "what's next." 'Dragon's Dream,' a ruffled blue from Harold McDonell, 'Michigander,' a beautiful green and gold combination of color from Bill Stuhar, 'Riverboat Queen,' a huge green monster from Olga Petryszyn and Bob Fox and 'Out of the Fog,' a cute speckled mini from Gary Myers.

We are now in the process of adding a new source of hostas to our retail line. They are either hosta species plants grown from wild collected seed or hybrids from Japan. Yes, the species are all green plants, at least so far, but they bring new forms of leaves, interesting flowers and new genetic material. For those of you that want to collect species hostas, here is a way to obtain "true" species plants free of foliar nematodes.

We are currently growing the following species hostas from Japan thanks to Hiroshi Abe: *H. sieboldiana*, 3 varieties of *H. kikutii*, *H. puchella*, *H. gracillima*, and *H. longipes caduca*. We will also offer next year two cultivars of Japanese origin, *H. rectifolia* 'Rasha Maru,' a magical little round-leafed hosta with great purple flowers, and 'Peace and Quiet' a cream-margined sport of 'Pandemonium.'

Here is a sneak peek at most of these new hostas. Check out our Hosta Preview coming later in December for full descriptions and pricing.

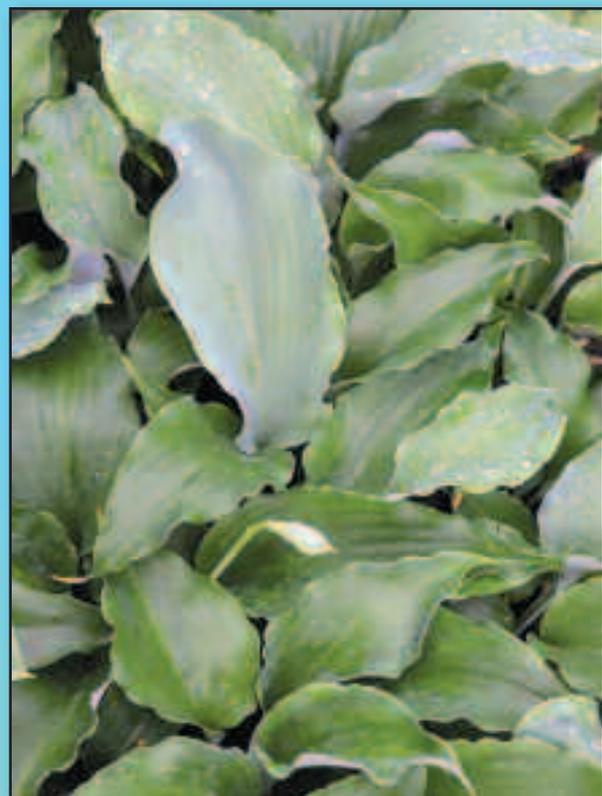
We are now on  
**Facebook**  
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*Hosta sieboldiana* in Japan



*Hosta* 'Bluebird of Happiness'



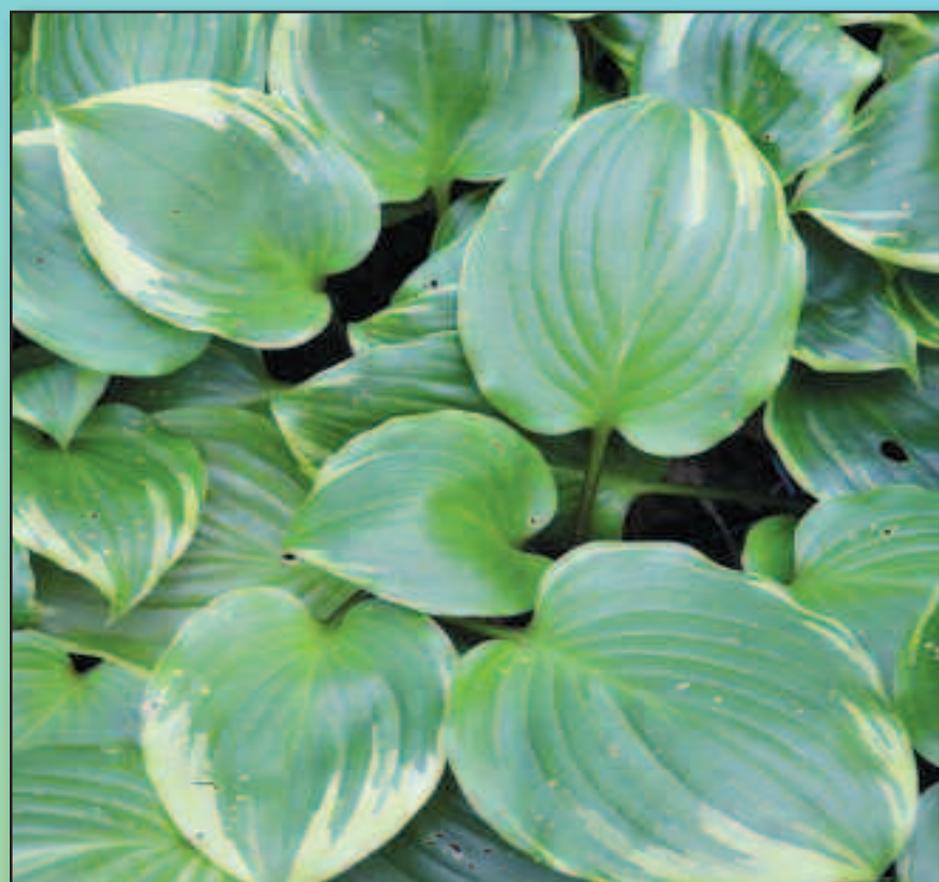
*Hosta* 'Dragon's Dream'



*Hosta rectifolia* 'Rasha Maru'



*Hosta* 'Pull of the Moon'



*Hosta* 'Peace and Quiet'



*Hosta* 'Avocado Toast'



**Hosta 'Sharp Dressed Man'**

### Introducing Erin Parks!

After three years of intense recruiting, I am pleased to announce that Erin Parks has decided to take a full time, year-round position at Green Hill Farm. After three years of working summers at the nursery she will now be heading up our hosta liner division. She not only brings new energy and ideas to the nursery but also continuity. I could not be more pleased. I like to think it was being able to work outside in a casual environment that put us over the top, but it may have actually been the frequent "company lunches."

Erin is a graduate of North Carolina State University where she trained to be a high school agriculture education teacher. She brings a background in sustainability, something we are constantly trying to improve at the nursery. She claims not to be a hosta collector but does have a few favorites. I think if asked she would probably say 'Jetstream' is her favorite hosta right now.

Some of you met her at the AHS Convention last year in Green Bay or in Iowa at In the Country Garden and Gifts. She will be a fixture with me behind the vending table at all the major events, so come up and introduce yourself. She is one of the new faces of the future of Hostadom.

# The local gossip 2020

## 'Sharp Dressed Man' wins the Benedict Garden Performance Medal

It was a tie, but it happened again. Much to my shock and delight my hosta 'Sharp Dressed Man' won the 2019 Benedict Garden Performance Medal. 'World Cup' was also chosen as a winner, a hosta from Doug Beilstein and Mark Zilis that we helped to introduce. It was like old home week.

This award does go to show you that hosta collectors and judges appreciate a white-centered hosta that grows dependably. I have always thought that the best white-centered hostas green up a little in the summer, so they do not melt but grow. 'Sno Cone' is our other introduction in that genre.

'Sharp Dressed Man' is a chance seedling with an interesting tale to tell. As many of you know, the 'Fortunei' group of hostas does not set seed reliably, in fact that was one of the main reasons that George Schmid reduced them from a species to cultivar status. We used to grow lots of 'Francee' and I still think it is a great landscape hosta and more durable than its now more famous sport 'Patriot.' One year, almost every pod set on a 'Francee' plant of mine in the nursery. Interesting but really no big deal since all the seedlings would normally be expected to be all green, not variegated.

But I was interested in those green seedlings. I wanted to study the variation. Would they all be the same color green, would any leaves have a different shape? Did the bees perhaps create a hybrid or two? So, I grew a hundred or so seeds, a full flat. All except two were pretty much identical in leaf shape and color but 2 were variegated. Truly quite a surprise! The best of those two seedlings became 'Sharp Dressed Man.' By the way, the real 'Sharp Dressed Man' is my son Michael.

## Hosta Days are back at In the Country Garden and Gifts

Sometimes you just cannot let a worldwide pandemic keep you down. Erin and I did make the trip out to Iowa for Josh Spece's ice cream social as planned with a few adjustments at In the Country Garden and Gifts. He limited the number of attendees in his barn for the talks to allow for social distancing and of course left all the doors wide open even during the brief hailstorm just as we were getting started. I gave two talks instead of one and again most everything was outside including lunch. The turnout was very good, and sales were brisk.

We plan to do it again on a Saturday next July and hopefully we can be at Hornbaker Gardens in Princeton, IL on the following Sunday. We will have more on the exact dates in next year's "Gossip" and of course on our website. Hope to see you there.

## Lucky 13<sup>th</sup> Sale in August a great success

We were also able to have our "Lucky 13 Sale" as planned. We were all outside and everyone collected their own hostas, labeled them, and bagged them themselves. The turnout was amazing! It was very much like those high times in Chapel Hill. I believe that for one day a year price should not be a factor in deciding which hostas you take home. Just gather what catches your eye. It is the perfect way to impulse buy.

With all hostas just \$13 even the \$50 ones you would think that everyone would flock to the most expensive ones and yes quite a few of them go out the door. Or maybe all the biggest plants would be chosen first, but neither is really the case. If anything, they grab the hostas first with showy flower scapes. People buying hostas for their flowers, imagine that. That just may be the future, especially during an August hosta sale.

## Hosta Guru Launched

It seemed like such a good idea as we sat here hunkered down last spring. Create a blog to help brighten everyone's sprits a little. It was also launched as an experiment to help us learn a little more about how social media can work for us. Erin and our interns kept up with our Instagram account pretty well this summer, but I must admit fatigue caught up with me in July and the guru went into hibernation. Once I get this little newspaper finished, I will get back to it, hopefully.

Check it out at HostaGuru.com. You can see my new truck and new look.

## New Logo

Did you notice it on the front page? Just last month we selected a new logo professionally prepared for Green Hill Hostas as part of our rebranding movement. I wanted something simple but friendly that tells people we are professionals in the hosta business. Hopefully, it says that to you. These are exciting times at Green Hill Farm.

# From The Potting Shed

## CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

this event! Bob grills hot dogs, I usually bake cookies, and people come out of the woodwork for hostas. The excitement is literally electric, and if you aren't careful, the hosta bug might just bite when you aren't looking. Resist the temptation to do shopping on your own, your favorites will change throughout the year (and remember that discount?).

Finally we have made it to June. You can leave your emergency slip-on sweat pants and sweatshirts at home; it's officially hot here in North Carolina. But don't worry, the fun is just beginning. There are no dress codes; although I heavily recommend shorts and crocs (you will soon learn why). In June we keep shipping, but things slow down enough for you to learn how to pot! You are introduced to the potting shed: the coolest place in the nursery. Here you will spend many July days potting and potting and still potting. So, start working on your music playlist now! Bob (or maybe I) will show you how to pot. And at first you will be worried about doing it right and go as slow as you can, but by the second cart of the day, you will feel like you can pot with your eyes closed. Of course, please don't actually close your eyes (the plants will eventually tell all of your potting secrets). Here you will also be introduced to how we survive hot North Carolina summers: the water hose. Every time we finish loading up a cart with new plants, we water and fertilize them before putting them away. As you will soon learn, the well water gets deliciously cold. And if you're wearing that pair of recommended crocs, you may enjoy hosing yourself off to cool down (this will be particularly tempting in July).

June will happen to fly by before you know it between shipping, potting, and sticking. And then we will slide into the dog days of summer. July will really feel laid back. Bob will do lots of traveling which means one thing: potting! You will literally pot a few thousand plants while he is traveling the country. Don't forget to put the labels in the pots and water the liners every other day.

This is where you become close friends to the other Green Hill Farm employees. You spend all day potting, talking, trading stories, giving advice, and listening to those playlists (make several, you'll eventually over-listen to them). And even though at the beginning of the summer you wanted to work until 5 everyday, you'll soon find yourself leaving by 3 pm to escape the July heat and humidity.

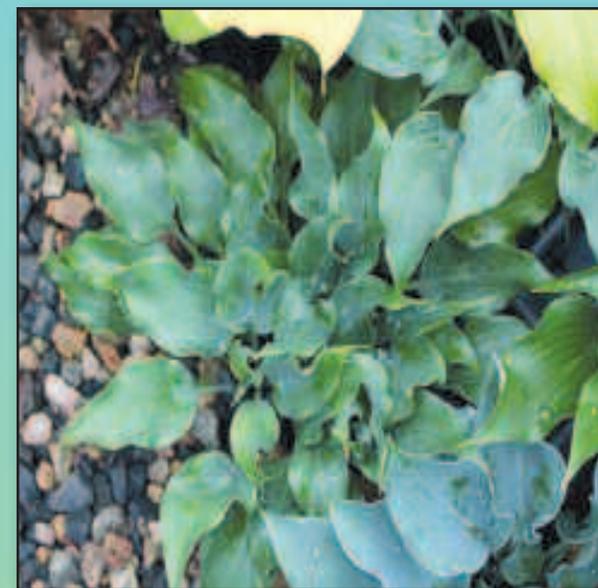
July will soon melt into August, and if you're one of the college students Bob frequently hires, you will be anticipating the start of a new semester. Although, I encourage you to stick around for The Lucky 13 Sale: a sale where every hosta is \$13 dollars. Talk about excitement. You'll get such a kick from watching everyone sweat over which hosta to get (or evening lining up 30 minutes early to have first pick). But soon your last day will come. We will celebrate with last day lunch, you'll write down your address for Bob to mail your next check, and another summer of life will come to a close.

You made it to the end of the season. And other than being able to pot and stick hostas in your sleep, what else have you learned? At this point, you have probably held a friendly potting shed debate about politics or religion, learning to see other opinions and point of views. And if the potting shed is full of women, you've also probably been submitted to the full range of girl talk. You will probably walk away from the nursery with a few more names in your contacts and some new friends. You have also probably learned to hate the slugs that hide under the bottom of pots; however, you don't kill them because of something Bob has taught you: "everything has to make a living."

You may walk away with a slight tan and a new appreciation for air conditioning. You've learned which hostas are your favorites and which ones make you groan just thinking about having to undo them. You've also learned which hosta names are better than others and maybe brainstormed some names of your own. You've learned how to ship plants out of the country, and how to effectively and securely tape up a cardboard box. Bob has

probably talked about science, ecology, and history (you will learn more from Bob than you will in a college class).

You've probably even picked up a few of Bob's healthy eating habits along the way. You will have learned your favorite lunch item at the Asian Bistro (a mostly Wednesday lunch tradition at Green Hill Farm). And if you have a summer birthday, it will be celebrated and remembered for once in your life (P.S. If you have a summer birthday, please apply. We want as many birthday lunches as possible). In fact, you may learn to start looking for every opportunity to celebrate even the small and mundane (yet wonderful) parts of life. And of course, take a favorite hosta or two with you to sit on your apartment balcony or backyard to remind you of your summer with Green Hill Farm. It might just be one of the best summers of your life.



**Hosta 'Twist Tie'**