

MICHIGAN HOSTA HAPPENINGS

Newsletter of the Michigan Hosta Society



In this issue of Hosta Happenings

*By Michael Greanya
Hosta Hillside Chair*

By now, we all know that 2020 has been a year of setbacks for our country. With our justifiable fears of this highly contagious virus, early on we were forced to remain at home and isolate from one another to help contain the rampant spread of COVID-19. The spread of the virus across Michigan resulted in the closing of a large portion of the state's economy and the closing of our schools. The closures included Michigan State University (MSU), which of course is

important to the Michigan Hosta Society, because many of our activities are tied to the University.

As spring began, it gave us an opportunity to get out of the house for some much needed garden therapy. On the night of May 8th, a sustained hard freeze of 25 degrees gripped the southern half of the Lower Peninsula for an extended period of about 12 hours.

The results were devastating to early emerging hostas and many other garden plants, especially those most susceptible to frost and freezes. Many of the damaged and disfigured hostas



Photo by Michael Greanya

would eventually somewhat recover by sending up a flush of new leaves, but others continue to show signs of damage

Hosta History

Philipp von Siebold (1791-1866), a doctor/botanist working for the Dutch, brought many species of hostas from Japan to Europe, including *H. undulata*.



In 1830, *H. sieboldiana* was sent to England from a botanic garden in Germany.



Robert Fortune (1813-1880), a Scottish botanist working for the Royal Horticultural Society and later for the East India Company, collected plants from China and Japan, including *H. 'Fortunei'*.



Thomas Hogg (1819-1892), an American working for the U.S. government in Japan, sent plants to his nursery in the United States.

Courtesy of Don Rawson from [Hosta, The Flowering Foliage Plant](#) (Portland, OR: Timber Press, Inc., 1990), Chapter 1, "The Historical Perspective."

through stunted leaf development because of crown damage and those hostas may or may not fully recover. Only time will tell, but sometimes when a crown is damaged, it may forever be stunted and can decline year after year until it eventually dies.

Hidden Lake Gardens, an MSU botanic garden,



Photos by Michael Greanya



completely closed down early in the year, but later was able to partially reopen with restrictions. These restrictions are still in force and only allow walking, hiking, biking, and driving through, with social distancing of 6' required. Volunteers are still not allowed to work at Hidden Lake

Gardens and Hosta Hillside.

Consequently, we have not been able to plan any Michigan Hosta Society functions this year. Our spring get-together where we work on the Hosta Hillside and have a potluck lunch with a speaker was cancelled. Our annual June hosta plant sale/ Hosta Show, which is a major fundraiser for MHS, was also cancelled. Our fall get-together at the Hillside for cleanup of the gardens, a picnic lunch, and plant auction (another major fund raiser), likewise had to be cancelled.



Photo by Michael Greanya

Pandemic fears also caused the shutdown of Hosta College in late February. Waiting a bit longer, the American Hosta Society was forced to cancel the 2020 convention in Minneapolis when it became apparent that the virus was not going away anytime soon. The AHS convention in Minneapolis is now scheduled for 2022. Hosta College has already been cancelled for 2021. The Upper Valley Career Center

(UVCC) in Piqua, OH is closed to all outsider activities until at least January 31st 2021, leaving the Great Lakes Regional Hosta Society, who organizes the event, not enough time to make preparations necessary to host Hosta College, and to assure the safety of teachers and attendees. The MHS will continue monitoring the virus as it relates

to our planned activities and will notify you when decisions have been made by the MHHDS Board.

Mark your calendar for the American Hosta Society National Convention

June 16-19, 2021 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The Southwest Michigan Hosta Society and the West Michigan Hosta Society will host the event at the Radisson Plaza and Suites. Of course, the uncertainty of the COVID-19 virus lingering into the summer next year is always a possibility and the Michigan Hosta Society and the American Hosta Society will continue to monitor the status of the virus. Your

safety will be paramount in their decision. More information will come later as a bulletin.

In this issue, Pam Rawson will tell us about her three favorite hostas in her article, *The Wonderful World Of Hostas*. Pam



Photo by Michael Greanya

asked to write this article on behalf of her husband Don, who continues to recuperate after a severe automobile accident. While Pam has professed that her real love is for iris and lilies, she does have a special affection for a few hostas in their garden beds. How could she not have a few favorites given the number of plants that Don has? A big thanks goes out to Pam for volunteering to write this wonderful article for us.

We will also explore a few garden myths that have perpetuated over time. These myths and many others are the type of ideas that started out and spread as facts,

but were not based on any real observations or science.

On the lighter side, let's look at some garden resolutions we make but we all know we never keep.

The Wonderful World of Hostess

By Pam Rawson

My name is Pam Rawson. Some of you may know me, many of you do not. I am the small, quiet woman standing by my husband Don, smiling at you while wondering why he is awestruck over a



new hosta. I have spent many hours going here and there just to visit hosta friends. While irises and lilies are my first love, I enjoy growing a few hostas.

In this article, I would like to share with you the three hostas that I currently grow. The first one is Hosta 'Tomahawk'. The first time I visited



Photo by Hugo Phillips

Van Wade, 'Tomahawk' was the hosta I picked out as my favorite. It was so cute with the various colors. I enjoyed the small size, thinking it would be a nice addition to our hosta collection. Van was always generous, giving away his hostas to any first-time visitor who asked. I have no idea how he ran a business. I know many, many hostas left his garden for free, year after year.

The second hosta I received one weekend when my husband decided to take me on a hosta tour. Don invited

his hosta friend Dan Myers with his wife MaryLou, and the four of us spent a lovely weekend looking at Wade & Gatton Nurseries. Van asked me what hosta I was looking for. I replied, "I want one from your secret stash, Van." He said, "My secret stash?" I said, "Yes, I know you have a hosta hiding here that no one else has." Van thought for a long time, then took me to a polyhouse and gave me a division of Hosta 'Pillow Talk'. I fell in love with this hosta. It has puckered cups, edged in gold. My husband asked me to share this rare find with some good friends for the 2018 convention. It magically appeared in their yard.

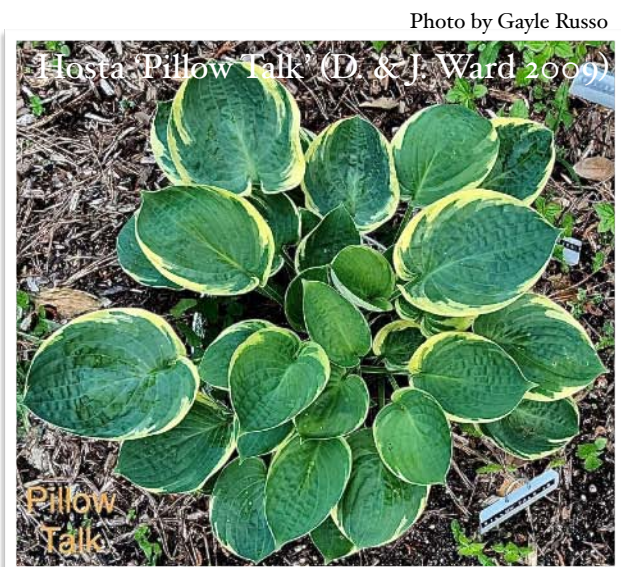


Photo by Gayle Russo

The third hosta I currently grow is a seedling from a streaked Hosta 'Empress Wu'. I won these seeds from a drawing at a West Michigan Hosta

Society event. The seed was donated by our friend, Noah Schwartz. I planted all 50 seeds I received and kept five noteworthy seedlings. This year, I evaluated the seedlings, choosing one and culling the rest. I informed my husband that he should



Noah "The Grower" Schwartz

follow my example, choosing 100 of his hosta seedlings and throwing out 400. Don laughed at me. His hosta friend Noah was no help whatsoever, insisting that every hosta we have is "cool."

I named my hosta seedling 'Mi Amiga' (NR), which I plan to keep for my lifetime, just to remind me that hosta lovers make the best friends.



Photo by Don Rawson

"There is something special about people who grow hostas", states Don Rawson. "I really can't explain it, but there is a bond of friendship that transcends through age, nationality, location, or economic standing."



Friends at Hosta College, Piqua Ohio 2019

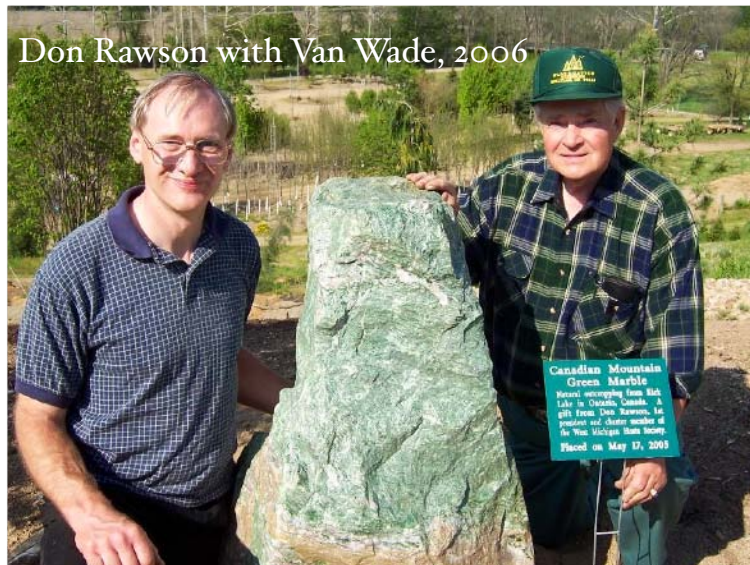
I will try to explain the wonderful world of hostas. I did not realize how many hosta people there were until we joined the West Michigan Hosta Society. I did not realize how many people LOVE hostas until my husband talked me into attending

Hosta College in Piqua, Ohio. I did not realize how crazy hosta people were about finding a new/unique/rare hosta. I finally met my first hosta guru, Van

Wade, and he won over my friendship by spending time with me and giving me one of his special hostas. One day, we took Van and Shirley out to visit hosta gardens. I remember it being so hot. I was more exhausted at 50 than they were at 80!

Van will always hold a special place in my heart as the ultimate hosta-giver.

Over the years, Don and I have had many garden tours. A bus of 55 hosta



Don Rawson with Van Wade, 2006

lovers would descend into our yard, marveling at everything they could see. My favorite group was from Chicago. The city people had never seen anything so

beautiful. It always surprised me that people were willing to buy anything

unique for any price. If they thought they had to have it, the price was insignificant. People often asked where we found all of our landscaping rocks. Our reply was that



Van and Shirley Wade at the Rawson's 2009

we found them from all over - Canada, Colorado, Montana, Florida, Georgia and many more. We spent 20 years of vacations hauling rocks here and there, often having our children sit on rocks

on the way home. After all, they were very special rocks. People would often ask how we grow our hostas so big. Don's reply was that we give them lots of water; Pam's answer was that we water them with steroids. Then I had to laugh when their eyes got so big and hungry for any new hosta growing techniques. Here is a photo of one person in our tour group who knew better than to believe a single word I said. That is because she is my hosta friend. I am so glad Don and I are part of the wonderful world of hostas.



MaryLou Myers, 2018

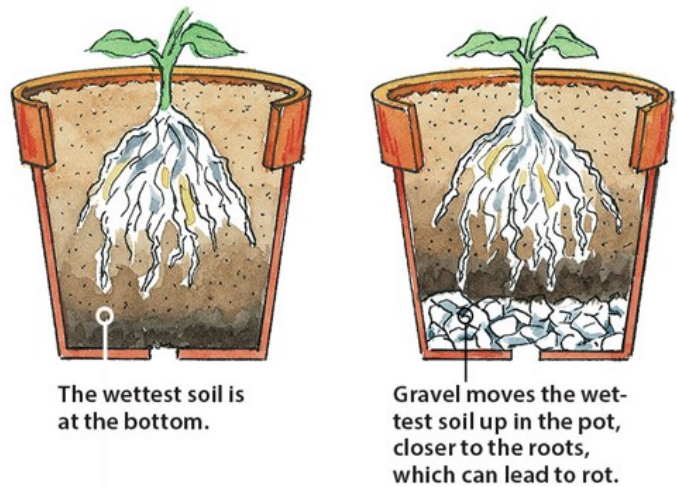
Photo by Pam Rawson

Debunking Gardening Myths

By Michael Greanya

Gravel improves pot drainage

It's all about the soil physics. Potting mixes sold in garden centers are designed for maximum aeration/



porosity and optimal water holding capacity. Roots need both air and water to survive. The bottom of a container is where the potting mix will be the wettest due to what is called a “perched water table” that is created by the bottom of the pot, even though there is a drainage hole.

If you add gravel to the bottom of the container, or as some people suggest Styrofoam packing peanuts, all you are

doing is reducing potting mix volume. The result is less capacity to hold air and raising the perched water table.

Try this experiment. Potting mix has micro- and macro-pore space. The micro-pore space holds the water once the mix has drained. Air will be in the macro-pore space once the water drains out. Now think of a sponge. It also has micro- and macro-pore spaces. The sponge is still damp if you squeeze it as hard as you can. That's because of the water that remains in the micro-pore space.

Now take a sponge and get it good and wet. Hold it so the smallest dimension (the thickness of the sponge) is horizontal. Allow the water to drain. But don't squeeze the sponge.



Once it stops dripping, hold the sponge so the width is vertical. Water will again drip out! Once it stops dripping, hold the sponge so the length

is vertical. You'll find even more water drips out. Well, think of the sponge as the depth of a pot. The deeper the pot, there will be more efficient drainage.



Photo by Marla Greanya

So, don't shorten the depth of the pot by adding gravel in the bottom!

*East Tennessee Hosta Society, Hosta Happenings,
August 2020

The correct way to pot plants is to:

1. Eliminate coarse material.
2. Fill the container with quality potting mix.
3. Add a mesh material, such as recycled mesh bags, a piece of screen, or landscape cloth, to minimize potting mix washing through the drainage holes.

If a gardening pesticide is organic, it must be safe!

Organic fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides seem to have the distinction of superiority with conventional gardening methods. When it comes to organic products for the garden



Photo by Marla Greanya

however, you really need to know the impact of the product on the environment as well as the consumer.

Insecticidal soap for example is relatively safe and effective for most applications as an insecticide. However, pyrethrum is an insecticide derived from some Chrysanthemums that contain this chemical compound. Although Chrysanthemums are natural and organic, this chemical can be toxic to beneficial insects as well as humans and animals if not handled properly.

When there is a need to use any chemical in the garden, always start with the least toxic product.

If you want a big plant put it in a big pot

We hear this myth all the time.

Repotting plants into larger pots won't help your plants get bigger, faster. In fact, with some plants, it may even slow down their growth because many species actually do better when kept in tighter quarters. Only repot when you see roots growing out of the drainage holes of the pot or if it has become so crowded that the pot actually cracks. And, when you do move your plant to a larger pot, select one that's only an inch or two wider than the original container.



Photo by Marla Greanya

Hostas need to be divided every 3-5 years

Nothing could be farther from the truth. While it is true that daylilies and some other perennials do benefit occasionally from being divided, hostas



Photo by Marla Greanya

need to be allowed to grow over a period of years to develop their perfect shape. As a hosta clump ages, it may compete with adjacent plants for space and some people do not like the leaves of the neighboring plants touching one another. But this is aesthetics and an individual gardener's preference and not one that is required to take action

or for the benefit of the plant. There are many clumps of hostas in gardeners' yards that are approaching 40 or more years old.

You have to remove hosta flowers to maintain your plants' health

To remove or not remove the hosta scapes and flowers. This has been an age-old question for decades. We were always told to cut the flower scapes off to promote faster development of the plant. In reality, hostas flowering only place low demands on the plant for



Photo by Michael Greanya

energy so it affects the plant very marginally and you're not likely to notice any difference in their growth.

Hosta flowers are attractive to bees, hummingbirds, and butterflies. And, if you haven't gotten downwind of plantaginea, you should. The fragrance from the flowers is remarkable. For that matter, most plants that have the plantaginea genetics in them will have fragrance that rival many other fragrant perennials.



Photo by Marla Greanya

The best time to divide hostas is in the spring

Actually, the best time to divide hostas is in the early fall about 4-6 weeks



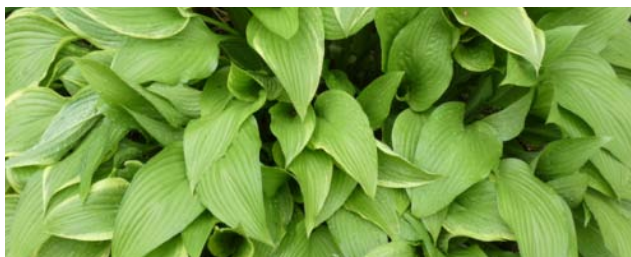
before the first frost. This is the time the hosta clump has stored as much energy as it can in the clump and dividing

then benefits the divisions by allowing them to be at the peak of health when they are replanted. Aside from the optimal time to divide, hostas can really be divided most any time during the year with pros and cons in spring vs

summer vs fall. It is important that the clump be well hydrated prior to digging and dividing though so watering the plant you intend to divide a few days in advance can help keep the plant from wilting and “pouting” the rest of the year.

Hostas love shade

Ask anyone who has been growing hostas for any length of time if hostas “love” shade and they will most likely tell you that hostas “tolerate” shade, but they prefer to have some sun during the day. Some hostas will even tolerate a whole day of sun. As with many shade tolerant plants though, morning sun until about noon is best. During this period, many hostas will take full sun, but as the daytime continues the sun’s rays and the heat it generates can begin to discolor (bleaching), burning edges of leaves, and melting the wax that makes the blue color on hosta leaves. Filtered light under canopies all day is ideal for hostas.



Garden Resolutions I Will Never Keep

- I will only make a “few” hosta purchases this year while I finish planting the ones I bought last year.



Photo by Marla Greanya

- I WILL STAY WITHIN MY BUDGET!!!!
- I will stop referring to the extra money in the budget as the “hosta fund” (That does not mean that I will stop using it as the hosta fund, however!)
- I am going to plant those seeds I collected last fall.
- I will have the beds prepared

BEFORE I order more hostas.

- I am going to photograph all my beds, label them with the plant names, and have a top-notch organizational system.



Photo by Marla Greanya

- I will not start a new project until I finish the last one.
- I will be ruthless — trimming back invasive plants I love and throwing out the excess, because I have NO MORE ROOM!
- I will remove all the maples from my yard.
- I will weed everyday it's not raining so it doesn't seem like such a big deal.

- I will not weed after work in a skirt, just pantsuits!
- I will walk through my gardens more often just to enjoy them, without stopping to pull out a weed.
- I will not care what my neighbors think when I am filthy from head to toe with my hair flying wildly behind my white stretch headband after a day in the garden (like they really care anyway).

Courtesy of members of the GardenWeb
Hosta Forum



Photo by Marla Greanya

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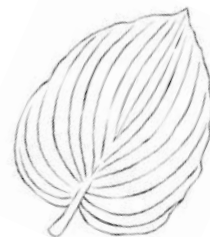
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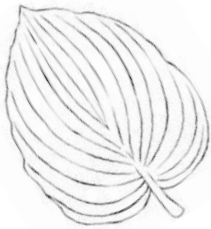
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Photos by Marla Greanya



Membership in the Michigan Hosta Society

If you wish to find out more about Hosta, please consider joining the Michigan Hosta Society. We welcome new members and friends who share our interest in hosta and their many uses in the landscape. The society maintains a large hosta display at Hidden Lake Gardens near Tipton, where many varieties of hosta can be seen. "The Benedict Hosta Hillside" is one of only two nationally designated Hosta display gardens.

Activities of MHS include:

- ▶ A summer tour of gardens that feature Hosta
- ▶ An auction/sale of hostas contributed by members
- ▶ Speakers and educational programs
- ▶ Local chapter meetings
- ▶ A workday and information sharing at Hidden Lake Gardens in Tipton where the Society has a demonstration garden
- ▶ A listing of MHS members who retail Hosta
- ▶ A yearly membership directory

Members receive the Michigan Society Newsletter "Hosta Happenings," as well as the newsletter of the Great Lakes Regional Hosta Society. If you are interested in joining please complete the attached application form.

You may also want to join The American Hosta Society. They have two colorful journals each year, and an annual national convention featuring a Hosta Show, garden tours, scientific programs and a plant auction.

Contact: www.americanhostasociety.org

MHS Membership Application

Last name: _____

First name: _____

Last name of 2nd member: _____

First name of 2nd member: _____

Street Address:

City: _____ State: _____

Zip: _____ Phone: _____ - _____ - _____

E-mail:

Choice of **either** black and white newsletter via First Class US Mail or full color newsletter via e-mail. All the pictures are in color and there are often bonus pictures not included in the mailed version. Please check one: Mail ☐ E-mail ☐

Check if you wish to receive an updated membership directory when published: ☐

New Member: _____ Renewal: _____

Dues are \$15 per household for up to two people, good for 2 years.

Total remitted: _____

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