



The American Hosta Society

July 2026

eNewsletter



H. 'Seducer'

S. Asch 2004

(Photo by Mary Vertz)

Table of Contents

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Chuck Doughty
Glenn Herold
Don Rawson
Gail Russo
Erica Lawrenz
Featured Columnists

<u>President's Message - Chuck Doughty</u>	3
<u>Hostas and Associates - Glenn Herold</u>	4
<u>Hosta Happenin's - Don Rawson</u>	31
<u>Hybridizer's Corner—Don Rawson</u>	38
<u>Welcome to My Garden—Gail Russo</u>	39
<u>Vendor Spotlight—Gail Russo</u>	40
<u>The Dirty Corner—Erica Lawrenz</u>	39
<u>And In Other Hosta News</u>	45
<u>AHS Convention</u>	47
<u>And In Regional News</u>	49
<u>AHS Advertising</u>	50
<u>Support Our Advertisers</u>	56

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President's Message

Chuck Doughty , Holbrook, MA

Fellow AHS Members,

Wishing to see you at 2027 Convention, Indianapolis, Indiana June 9-12!

The 2026 Convention held in Dublin, Ohio, was an amazing and invigorating experience. The faithful convention attendees were immersed in all things hosta: informative speakers, leaf competitions, seedling and design exhibits, plant auctions, judging clinics, vendors selling great hosta plants and garden items, banquets, and many incredible gardens. The members of the Central Ohio Hosta Society rolled out the red carpet, allowing us to feel like “Buckeyes” during the four days of the convention. Considering all aspects of Buckeye Hosta Fever, the hospitality was outstanding. National conventions are experiences that last for many years.

My first convention experience began 2010 in Bloomington, Minnesota, the theme “Stars of the North.” Being my first convention, I still have many memories of the gardens, the hospitality, and the friendly people who shared a common interest in hostas, companion plants, and the sharing of knowledge.

Our local hosta groups help raise funds and awareness, provide opportunities, and attract new members. The enthusiasm created by our local groups is where awareness of the possibilities of hostas as a “go-to plant” for shade gardens begins. Many gardeners are unaware of the unique cultivars of hostas. Strong local societies create greater awareness of the plant we love.

Social media is helping attract new enthusiasts. While social media has its drawbacks and critics, it is a powerful tool for promoting awareness and sharing information. Social media is important because it helps connect with our target audience, enhance visibility, and foster engagement.

In addition to the aesthetic benefits and ease of maintenance that hostas bring to our gardens, attracting more hosta enthusiasts will likely increase membership in AHS. Young people, in particular, use social media almost exclusively to obtain information. Encouraging younger generations to develop an interest in gardening should be a goal for all of us. Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of ideas and interests.

As we all know, hostas are amazing plants. People who love hostas are truly lovers of people as well. Hostas have made me a better person, allowing me to share a wide range of experiences while gaining familiarity, awareness, and understanding in life, work, and society.

Hosta = “The Friendship Plant”!

May that phrase never become trite.

“Go plant your own garden and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers.”

— Jorge Luis Borges



Hostas and Associates

Glenn Herold, Cedarburg, WI

Genetic Modification of Plants

Photos by Glenn Herold

Many of us have seen advertisements for hostas with bright red leaves. We currently have plants with “red” extending into the leaf blade, but they are not fire-engine red. Purple would be a better description. Has a recent breakthrough been made? Unfortunately, we are not yet at that point. Pictures of hostas with bright red leaves are just an advertising come-on. But is it possible? Well.... Maybe. Through genetic modification of the plant’s genes, anything is possible.

It’s rare for a topic regarding plants to be controversial, but if there is one subject that can instigate a heated discussion, it might be that of genetic modification of a plant’s DNA. Genetic modification (GM), also called genetic engineering, is the process of inserting DNA which did not previously exist in a plant’s genome into cells of that plant. The cells are then grown in tissue culture where they develop into new plants. Seeds produced by that plant inherit the new DNA.

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) is the material that makes up the chromosomes found within the nucleus of a cell. It consists of two strands that wind around each other to form a double helix and contain the genetic information that determines how an organism develops and functions. The structure of DNA was discovered in 1953 by James Watson and Francis Crick at Cambridge University. Genes are regions of the DNA that carry instructions for making proteins, which give the plant its characteristics. Each plant cell contains about 30,000 genes. During the genetic modification process, one to ten genes are added to the genome, which is the complete set of genes or genetic material present in a cell or organism.

Traditional breeding of plants has been going on for thousands of years. Plants are hybridized with a compatible plant, usually of the same genus or species, in order to get the desirable characteristics of both plants. For example, *Hosta plantaginea* may be crossed with *Hosta yingeri* to get a plant with the flower fragrance of *Hosta plantaginea* but the plant size and spider-like flowers of *Hosta yingeri*.

If the gene that contributes to fragrance could be identified, it could be inserted into a cell of *Hosta yingeri* to get the looked-for result much quicker than through traditional breeding. For GM to be effective, the gene for fragrance must first be identified and isolated. Complications arise when a characteristic is affected by more than one gene.

Genetic engineering is useful when a gene for a given characteristic does not exist in the plant genome or in the genome of a plant with which it can hybridize. One could argue that if you waited long enough, the plant population would eventually develop the characteristic because of mutations that occur during cell division. That may be true, but you may have to wait thousands of years for that to transpire and be discovered, while GM could do it within months. Genetic modification was developed in the 1970s and is now common in many vegetable crops. It is generally used on agriculture crops, rather than ornamentals, because of greater volume and the potential for higher monetary gains. Some common examples of genetically modified plants include corn, soybeans, cotton, potatoes, and certain varieties of apples (e.g., Arctic apples), which are often engineered for traits like insect resistance, herbicide tolerance, or improved shelf life.

Genetic modification is accomplished in one of two ways. One is to force a DNA fragment into plant cells which have been isolated and placed in a petri dish or test tube. The other method is to transfer the desired DNA into a bacterium, usually *Agrobacterium tumefaciens*, which in turn transfers the DNA into the host cells. In either case, the host cell is then grown in tissue culture. Every cell has the blueprint to regenerate an entire organism.

Those who are opposed to genetic modification point to the fact that food is changed in an unnatural way that potentially is not good for your health. Concerns include allergies and even cancer. To counter this, those who favor GM point out that all modified plants must have FDA approval before they can be marketed and that there is no data to prove that consumption of GM food is bad. The first GM product approved by the FDA (in 1982) was human insulin used to treat diabetes. If consumption of GM foods concerns you, purchase those labelled as “organic,” for they cannot by law be genetically modified.

Genetically engineered ornamental plants are still in the experimental stage, for the most part. A bioluminescent petunia that glows in the dark, being marketed as ‘Firefly,’ though, has recently become available. It has flowers that are white during the day but glow a faint green in the dark. Research continues for creating carnations or roses with a true-blue color, and to develop plants with improved fragrance, enhanced vase life, reduced invasiveness, pest resistance, improved environmental tolerance, increased cold hardiness, and other characteristics. Who is to say that hostas with leaves the color of fire engines couldn’t be next?

While genetic modification may be controversial, it is here to stay and is likely to expand as the technique becomes more widespread and inexpensive. Though it is unlikely to occur in my lifetime, I look forward to the day when giant sequoias line the shores of Lake Michigan and hostas are available in hues of Badger Red!

Additional articles on plants and gardening can be found on my blog: <https://TheCottageGardener53012.Wordpress.com>



The spider-like flowers of *Hosta yingeri*



The “red” leaves of *Hosta* ‘Red Ninja’



Hostas Happenin's

Don Rawson, Grand Rapids, MI

A Formal Salute to *Hosta* 'Salute'

When Herb and Dorothy Benedict registered *Hosta* 'Salute' in 1995, little were they aware of the role it would play in the creation of new cultivars in the following decades. They declined to include any notable characteristics in the registration, in spite of the inherent qualities it possesses. However, in subsequent years, hybridizers would exploit its positive traits — the long wavy leaves, good blue color, and its upright form — to develop introductions such as 'Skywriter', 'Blushing Blue', and 'Joy Ride'. While never showing up in the AHS Popularity Polls, 'Salute' is a garden worthy cultivar and it should be recognized for the important part it has played in Hostadom.



Photo by Bob Olson. Used by permission.

Hosta 'Salute' — long wavy leaves, good blue color, and upright form. The beautiful specimen above was photographed in the garden of Jamie Street and Dick Butler in their Indianapolis garden.

The Origin of Hosta ‘Salute’

‘Salute’ resulted from a cross made by the Benedicts in 1987. The registration lists it as a selfed fourth generation seedling of ‘Dorset Blue’. However, Mark Zilis cites a conversation with Herb in 1991 in which he conveyed that ‘Salute’ is a cross of *Hosta kikutii* f. *leuconata* × ‘Tardiflora’ (*The Hostapedia*, p. 807). The leaf shape, number of vein pairs, and powdery white leaf backs certainly make that a possibility.

At maturity, ‘Salute’ forms a mound that is 18” high by 36” wide. The glaucous blue-green foliage is smooth and has thick substance, with individual leaves reaching a length of 8” long by 4.25” wide and having nine vein pairs. Near white, tubular flowers are produced in August and September on 26” scapes. ‘Salute’ slightly resembles a smaller ‘Krossa Regal’, although it does not share a similar parentage. The name ‘Salute’ is quite appropriate, since the upright, pointed, blue leaves with wavy edges indeed seem to be saluting.



Photo by Bob Olson. Used by permission.

Hosta ‘Salute’ — the perfect name for this mid-size blue-green Benedict creation with wavy, upright foliage that is hard to beat!

The origin of the hand salute is uncertain. It may date all the way back to late Roman antiquity, in which assassinations were common. During this time, a citizen who wished to approach an official had to do so with their right hand raised to show that they did not have a weapon. Centuries later, it was traditional for knights wearing armor to raise their visors when meeting a comrade.



U.S. Army Reserves Specialist John Norton. Photo by Ashley Norton. Used by permission.

Hand salutes are commonly carried out by bringing the right hand to the head in some way, the precise method varying between countries and sometimes among the various branches of the armed forces of the same country.

Other historians point to the U.S. Army Quartermaster School's explanation, which says that it was military courtesy for subordinates to remove their headgear in the presence of their superiors. As late as the American Revolution, British Army soldiers saluted by removing their hat. With the advent of increasingly cumbersome headgear in the 18th and 19th centuries, the practice of removing one's hat gradually transitioned to the simpler gesture of grasping or touching the visor and issuing a courteous salutation.

Hand salutes are normally carried out by bringing the right hand to the head in some way, the precise manner varying somewhat between countries. In many militaries, hand salutes are only given when a head cover such as a hat is worn.

How to Salute Properly

A proper hand salute (as used in the U.S. military) is rendered with the right hand. Stand straight, raise your hand directly to your face, and touch the tip of your right forefinger to the brim of your hat or the outer edge of your right eyebrow. Keep your fingers straight and palm tilted slightly downward.

“Saluting,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Xf-hHfX4as>

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Saluting may seem straightforward, but new recruits commonly stumble over a few areas. Here are some pitfalls to watch out for:

Lazy or Half-Hearted Salutes

Always salute with intent and precision. A limp hand or loose fingers will come across as disrespectful. Be crisp and sharp. This is the best way to salute properly in the military.

Missing Salutes in Formal Settings

Failure to salute during ceremonial events or national anthem presentations can be seen as a serious breach, so remember how to salute properly in the military by following the aforementioned protocols.

Using the Wrong Hand

The salute is traditionally performed with the right hand unless an injury or disability prevents it.

Forgetting Proper Eye Contact and Posture

A good salute is as much about your overall demeanor as it is about the hand gesture.

USAMM, <https://www.usamm.com/blogs/news/how-to-salute-in-the-military>

The Role of ‘Salute’ in the Development of New Cultivars

H. ‘Salute’ should be a part of any extensive hosta collection. Among the thousands of cultivars peddled to gardeners today, this medium-size distinctive hosta should be considered because it can hold its own in any shaded retreat. First coming to market in the mid-1990s, ‘Salute’ is still readily obtainable from both North American and European sources.

What does it bring to the table for the hybridizer? Zilis notes that ‘Salute’ “...should be a good candidate for those wanting to incorporate a vase-shaped mound habit, waviness, blue-green leaf color, and substance into their seedlings.”

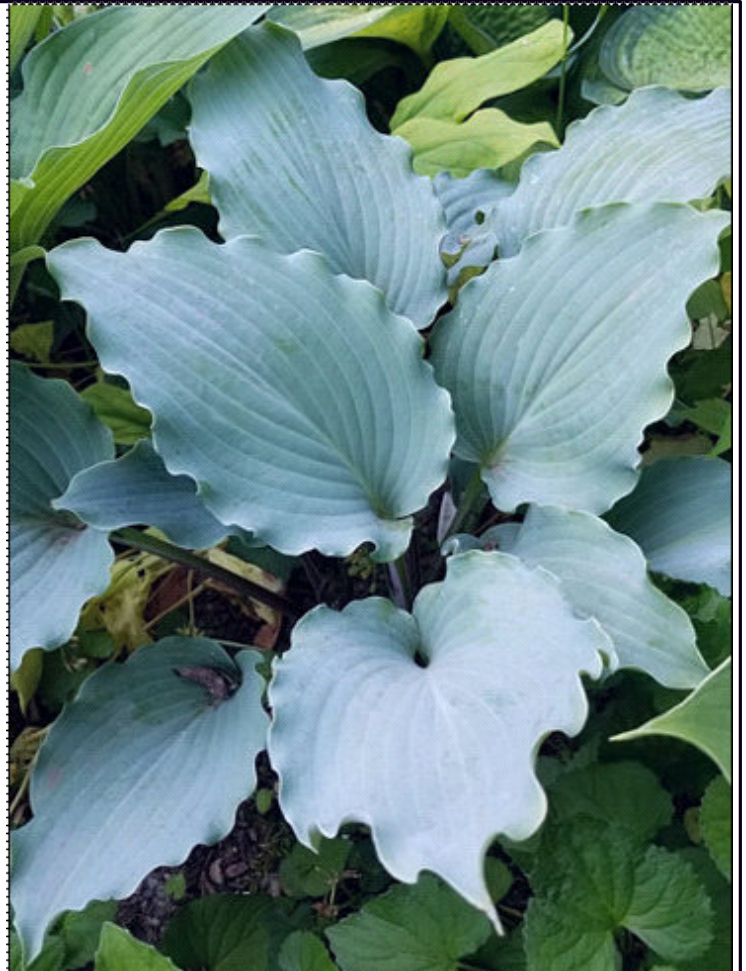
A review of the registration details on the Hosta Registry website documents the following hybrids of ‘Salute’, not to mention those originations that have not been registered:

‘Cutting Edge’ (H. Gowen – 1999)
‘Flemish Gold’ (D. Van Eechaute – 2006)
‘Neptune’ (H. Hansen – 2006)
‘Restless Sea’ (H. Hansen – 2006)
‘Lily Blue Eyes’ (G. Donsky – 2007)
‘October Sky’ (D. Dean – 2008)
‘Smoke Signals’ (B. & D. Stegeman – 2008)
‘Yes, Sir!’ (G. Donsky – 2009)
‘Forgery’ (F. Nyikos – 2011)
‘Petticoat Junction’ (D. & M. Beilstein – 2013)
‘KL’s Choice’ (M. Sully – 2014)
‘Joy Ride’ (H. Hansen – 2016)
‘ZIP Code’ (D. & M. Beilstein – 2018)
‘Yippee’ (D. & M. Beilstein – 2020)
‘Talking Point’ (D. & M. Beilstein – 2021)
‘Jabberwocky’ (R. Hatt – 2022)
‘Blazing Dawn’ (D. Dean – 2023)

The impact that ‘Salute’ has made is even more significant when one researches the role of just one of its offspring – Hosta ‘Neptune’ – which continues to be widely used by hybridizers to this day. A great many cultivars have ‘Neptune’ somewhere in the mix, which in turn is a hybrid of (H. ‘Maekawa’ × H. ‘Halcyon’) × H. ‘Salute’. As an avid hosta breeder myself, I have often said that my hybridization program is built upon the work of those who have gone before me, and the influence that ‘Salute’ has had in Hostadom illustrates that. My hat is off to the Benedicts, and to their wonderful creation named ‘Salute’!



H. 'Neptune' (H. Hansen – 2006)
(*H.* 'Maekawa' × *H.* 'Halcyon') × *H.* 'Salute'



H. 'Skywriter' (D. Wols – NR)
H. 'Marilyn Monroe' × (*H.* 'Neptune' × *H.* 'Smoke Signals')

These beautiful, wavy-leaved blue hostas 'Neptune' and 'Skywriter' owe their very existence to 'Salute', a creation of Herb and Dorothy Benedict from over three decades ago.

Photo credits: Kathie Sisson and Teresa Maki, respectively.



Hybridizer Corner . . .

Don Rawson, Grand Rapids, MI

We are so happy that you are interested in hybridizing your very own new hosta. Doing so is a lot of fun! While there will be some challenges along the way, it is a very rewarding pursuit. We hope that the *Hybridizer Corner* will be helpful as you navigate the field of hybridization.

Review

In a previous issue, it was noted that hybridizing should be goal-oriented. Setting goals is helpful in accomplishing many of life's tasks and is essential in a well-planned hybridizing program. Doing so will help to determine which plants to cross in order to make the new hosta that matches your goal.

Make sure your goals are realistic. Then choose parent plants that will most likely produce the intended results. Collecting a gene pool of hostas to work with is very beneficial. And now you are ready for making the actual cross but remember that hybridizing is a long-term project. You will probably not end up with a perfect finished product in just one cross. Reaching your goal will likely involve generations upon generations of crosses, but each cross will get you a little closer to achieving it. So, let's get started!

Write down your hybridizing goals. Your goals do not to be extremely detailed or complex. Keep them realistic. Many hybridizers have gone before you and have tried numerous combinations, only to realize their goal was simply unrealistic. Perhaps you want to improve the margin on a cultivar which is already growing in your garden. Or you may want to make a slightly puckered hosta even more corrugated. You may have some large hostas, but you envision one that is greater in size than any you have ever encountered. The point is that if you love great big, blue hostas, you need not waste your time working with small gold plants. The idea is to bring a little focus to your hybridizing efforts.

- 1. Set a hybridizing goal.**
- 2. Make sure your goal is realistic.**
- 3. Choose parent plants which will most likely produce the intended results.**

Once your goals have been set, start an aggressive campaign to research which existing hostas will be most likely to produce the intended results. Collecting a gene pool of hostas to work with is essential. Obtaining some of those plants may take time and money, but they will likely save you many years of work in the long run.

Hybridizing for Cupped Leaves

One characteristic that many gardeners find attractive are hostas with cupped leaves, whether they be concave (e.g., *Hosta Abiqua Drinking Gourd*) or convex (e.g., 'Hoosier Dome'). Some are deeply cupped (enough to hold water), while others are only slightly cupped. Have you thought about creating new hosta varieties that have cupped leaves? In this issue, we will focus on hybridizing for cupped and folded leaves.

Cupping occurs when the center of the leaf grows faster than the margin, causing the leaf to be cupped upward or downward. This genetic trait is most commonly expressed in *H. sieboldiana* and its progeny. As a side note, *H. sieboldiana* is a large hosta with broadly ovate to round leaves and good corrugation. Therefore, most cupped hostas are also medium to large, corrugated plants with ovate to round leaves.

On the other hand, hostas with leaves that are folded, such as 'Billfold', Blue Canoe', 'Praying Hands', and 'Silver Tongue Devil', generally have lance-shaped leaves, but the cupping occurs the same way: the center of the leaf grows faster than the margin. Do you prefer those with round, cupped leaves, or narrow lance-shaped, folded leaves?

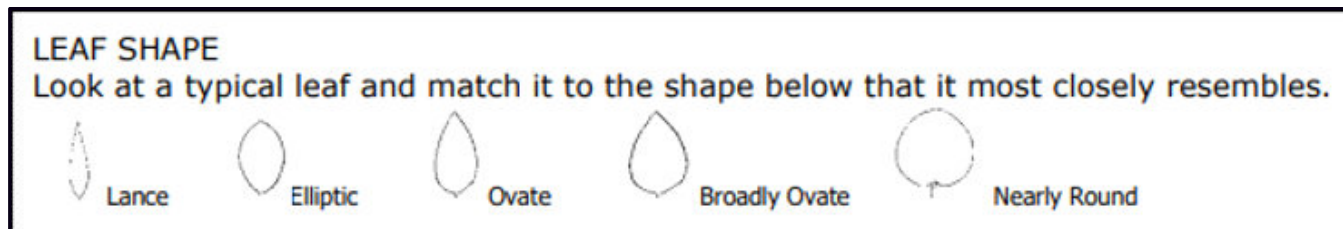


Photo by Kathie Sisson, Used by permission.

H. 'Billfold' (K. Sisson – NR) has intense blue, folded leaves that are held upright on a vase-shaped mound. Note the white leaf backs that are evident due to the folding of the leaf blade. *H.* 'Billfold' won the William and Eleanor Lachman Award (chosen by the AHS Judges as the Best Seedling Overall) at First Look 2013.

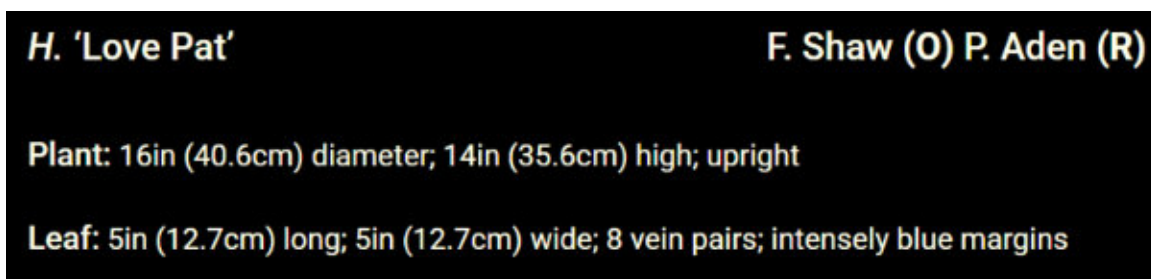
Broadly Ovate, Cupped Leaves

What is meant by the term “broadly ovate”? When registering a new hosta, one of the requirements is to describe the leaf shape using the following guideline:



Broadly ovate means that the leaf width nearly equals the leaf length.

Very few hostas have perfectly round leaves in which the length and width are equal. The majority have leaves in which the length is greater than the width. The length is recorded first, followed by the width (in inches and centimeters):



Once your goal has been set — whether to hybridize for cupped leaves or folded leaves — start an aggressive research campaign to learn which existing hostas will be most likely to produce the desired results. One helpful resource is the list of cup-leaved hostas posted on the Hosta Lists website at https://www.hostalists.org/hosta_list_cpl.php. Those which are very deeply cupped are indicated with an asterisk (*). In addition, a list of convexly-cupped hostas is posted at https://www.hostalists.org/hosta_list_cvxl.php.



Two commonly available, blue-leaved cupped hostas are ‘Abiqua Drinking Gourd’ (left) and ‘Love Pat’ (right). Both are large plants with good leaf substance and intense corrugation. They also set seed readily.

Photo credits: Chantal Fortier and Linda Turner, respectively.

Now begin assembling a collection of hostas to work with. You may already have some in your garden that would serve as good pod and pollen parents for cupped leaves. Obtaining a few other cup-leaved varieties to use will be beneficial. If there are other characteristics that you value — blue or yellow foliage, smooth leaf surface vs. intense corrugation, exceptional leaf substance, good vigor and growth rate, etc. — keep that in mind when adding to your gene pool.



Some of the author's deeply-cupped originations: (1) 'Blueberry Scoop', (2) 'Catcher's Mitt', (3) 'Gator Bowl', and (4) 'Super Scoop'. As hybrids descending from *H. sieboldiana*, most cup-leaved hostas are medium to large plants with corrugated foliage.

Hybridizing for Folded Leaves

If your goal is to produce new varieties with folded leaves, there are plenty of pod and pollen parents to choose from. Refer to the list of Folded-Leaved Hostas posted at https://www.hostalists.org/hosta_list_flh.php. Folded-leaved cultivars range from small varieties like 'Hands Up' and 'Tortifrons' to med-large plants like 'Raucous Ruffles' and 'Stephen King'. One characteristic to consider is if you want the leaves to cup upward or

downward. Another trait you may take into account is if you want your folded-leaved progeny to be upright (as with ‘Praying Hands’) or to be horizontal.

When selecting hostas to add to your gene pool, it is essential to make sure they are fertile — ideally both pod and pollen fertile. Referring to the list of Sterile Hostas at https://www.hostalists.org/hosta_list_sterh.php will be helpful.

Looking at the Underside

The leaf underside of hosta species and cultivars ranges from very shiny to slightly shiny to dull to having an intensely white bloom. “Bloom” is the waxy coating on a leaf, stem, or pod surface, producing a dusty appearance. This natural, powdery, or frosty wax coating is known botanically as glaucous or pruinose bloom. The plant naturally secretes specialized waxes onto the outermost layer of the leaf (the cuticle) in tiny, crystalline structures. Even the flower petals can be coated in waxy bloom.

The purpose of pruinose bloom is threefold:

- Sunscreen: The waxy layer reflects harmful UV rays and intense light, which prevents the leaf from overheating and getting sunburnt.
- Water barrier: It repels water, causing rain to bead and roll off, which discourages fungal growth and bacterial diseases, and self-cleans the leaf surface.
- Pest deterrence: The powdery surface makes it difficult for insects like slugs and certain pests to navigate or feed on the foliage.

When hosta leaves are cupped upward, the leaf underside becomes apparent. As opposed to a shiny surface, many gardeners find hostas that have a white underside to be more attractive. This is something to take into account if breeding for cup-leaved hostas. How much bloom is on the pod and pollen parents you are using?



Photo by Chris Wilhopite. Used by permission.

Hosta ‘White Caps’ has a powdery, white bloom on the leaf underside, but the leaf must be raised to see it. With the right cross, can this waxy, white coating be transferred to a cup-leaved hybrid where it would be readily observed?

Deeply-cupped Hostas — How Much Cupping is Too Much?

Have you thought about the degree of cupping that you find attractive, and is there a maximum limit to how radically cupped a hosta leaf could possibly be? Imagine this: could a new hybrid be created with concavely cupped leaves that look like perfect spheres suspended upward in space? Or if cupped downward (convexly), could one have leaves so cupped to appear to have balls of foliage hanging from petioles? Are such extremes even possible?

One advantage to making hostas so radically cupped would be the ability to prevent debris from collecting inside the leaves, a complaint about cup-leaved hostas that is sometimes heard from gardeners. Cleaning detritus from the leaves in preparation for a hosta tour or leaf show is time consuming, sometimes requiring a feather duster, forceps, leaf blower, water hose, or other suitable tool. But if a hosta with leaves so cupped to form spheres could be created, then unwanted debris would be avoided.

Hostas that are convexly cupped naturally repel any debris that would otherwise fall and collect on the leaf surface.



Photo by Don Rawson.

Cleaning debris from cup-leaved hostas is a nuisance, especially if they are located directly under a tree that drops leaves, needles or twigs where they collect debris constantly. For this reason, some gardeners deplore cup-leaved hostas.

In the Next Issue...

In the next issue, we will look at how to ripen hosta seeds by placing a scape in sugar water or by using an aeroponic propagator (cloner), in the event that they are not mature when an autumn frost occurs. Just one of the many tricks that hybridizers have discovered over the years. Stay tuned!



H. 'Grandma's Deep Scoops' (D. Rawson — NR).



Welcome to My Garden

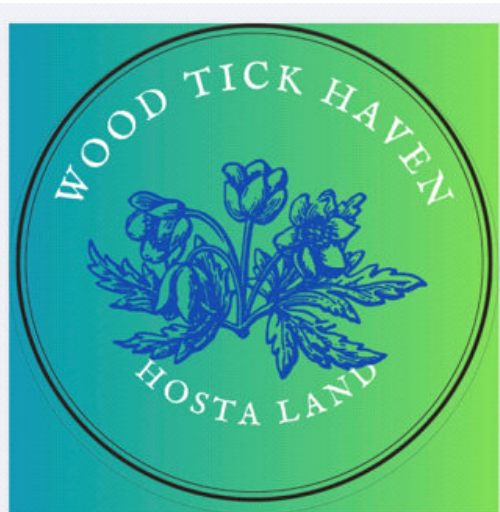
Gail Russo, Cedarville, New Jersey



Gail Russo

Please meet

Monica Kurschner
of Wood Tick Haven in
Barron, Wisconsin.



Based on soil, climate and ideal growing conditions, Wisconsin is considered to be one of the best states to grow hostas in. This is evidenced by the number of retail hosta nurseries located throughout the state, and the considerable number of American Hosta Society members who focus on hostas in their gardens across Wisconsin. There are many conventions and hosta events hosted in Wisconsin annually where attendees enjoy touring hosta gardens, which there is no shortage of! It can be a challenge for a new hosta enthusiast to be noticed when there are so many other established gardens to visit. In this edition, you will meet Monica Kurschner, one of the newcomers who is working hard to build a hosta specialty garden that she has named Wood Tick Haven, just 100 miles south of Lake Superior in Barron, Wisconsin.

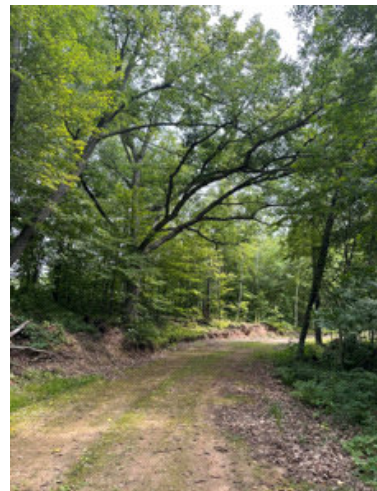
Monica comes from a lengthy line of gardeners and has had her hands in soil as far back as she can remember. She fondly recalls the gardens of her parents and grandparents resplendent with flowers and vegetables that they ate at dinner. As a child,

she helped harvest the gardens and then learned in the family's kitchen how to can and preserve those vegetables to enjoy the summer flavors over the long winter. She remembers road trips with her mom and dad when they would pull over to the side of the road to collect fresh asparagus or berries to enjoy at dinner, or to freeze to enjoy later. A treasured memory is of her grandfather carving a cucumber into a boat or car with his pocketknife and attaching a string to it so the children could play alongside the adults harvesting the garden. Her grandmother taught her to split dandelion stems and put them in cold water to make curls. These lessons fostered a love of gardening that became second nature to her. She passed these lessons down to her own children and is pleased to see that they have planted gardens of their own at their homes. It's a generational love.

In 1998, Monica purchased a 20+ acre property in Barron, Wisconsin with her partner, Stephen Witthoft. She always had gardens at each of her homes in the past, and this was no exception. Located in planting hardiness zone 4a/4b, the winters can be brutal, but when spring finally arrives, many plants thrive in the mild summers. She focused on the land surrounding the home, as that was what she would look at daily and what beautifies a home.

The soil in this area is dark and nutrient rich, but there is a thick layer of clay underneath, and it is quite dry and rocky due to a highway in front of the home. Faced with the need to amend the soil for planting, and wanting to enhance the flat expanse of land, she visited multiple nurseries to shop for plants and supplies.

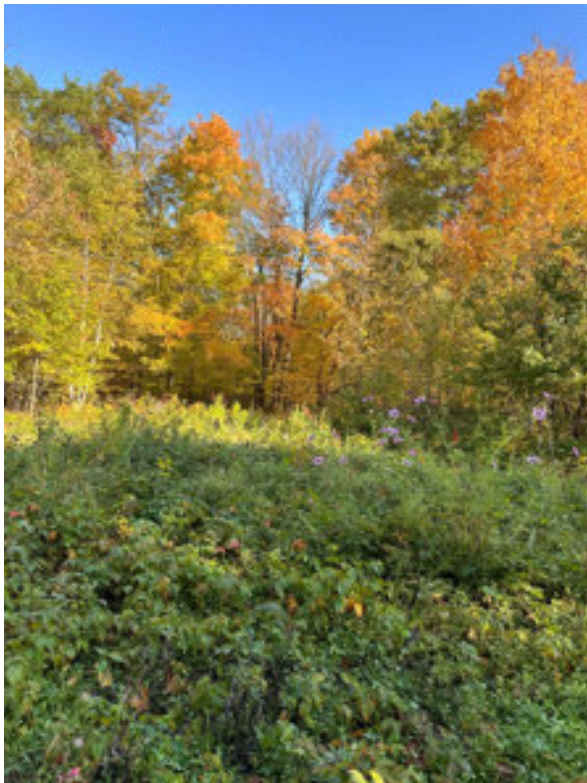
It was during one of these visits while Monica was browsing the hosta section that she met a woman who told her she grows more than 200 varieties of hostas in her garden. Monica remembered that hostas had always thrived for her despite how poorly she had cared for them and thought that she'd like to grow more of them because it's hard to hurt them! They also thrive despite the brutal Wisconsin climate. This began her love of hostas, and her collection has grown to nearly 400 varieties! As she planted her gardens and added more hostas and other plants such as phlox, daylilies, bee balm, primrose and ajuga, she quickly ran out of space near the house. It was time to expand. Monica had a long-standing dream of sharing the beautiful gardens that she created with her children and grandchildren; taking long walks with them and other garden enthusiasts through her property that she named Wood Tick Haven.



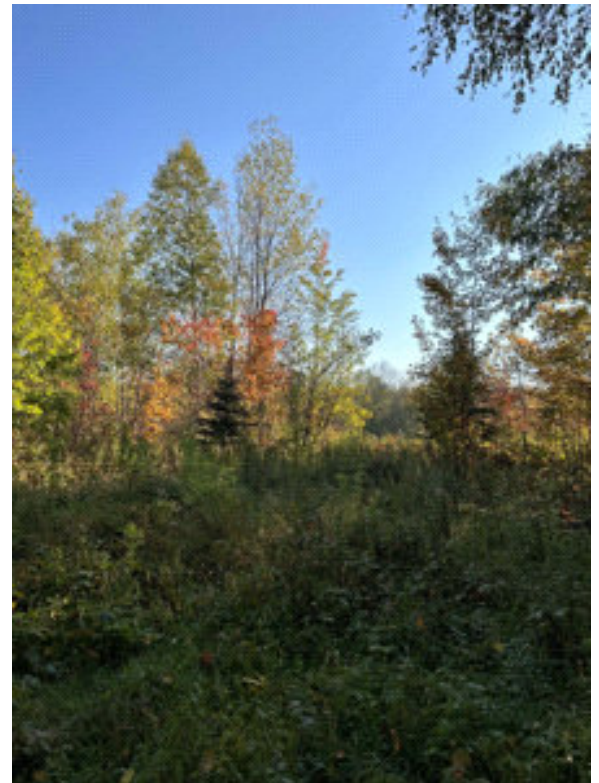
Wood Tick Haven South began as a blank slate. Monica and Stephen have spent many years transforming it into an enjoyable retreat.

In 2023, she began to refer to the established portion of the garden as Wood Tick Haven South (WTHS), with the expansion becoming Wood Tick Haven North (WTHN). Monica's main issue is that she has grown to love hostas and she wants them all! I suppose many of us can relate to that. WTHS is designed for them to sit in and walk through easily, with the vegetables they harvest from the garden near the home. The goal here is to provide color and interest year-round, while also being a useful part of the outdoor living area. WTHN has become the overflow project that is constantly expanding with trees, pollinator plants and all the giant hostas.

WTHN is twenty acres of hilly, sandy, dry soil that must be amended and planted with trees to establish the shade for her hostas. There are a few swampy areas scattered across the land too. Local guidelines restrict the planting of invasive varieties of plants, but besides that, she has a gigantic blank slate. Her source of water is city water, but she hopes to add a private well to WTHN one day. For now, hoses, sprinklers and watering cans supplement natural rain when necessary, but she hopes to add a few drip lines this year to ease the burden. She plans to add fencing in the future to keep the deer out, but for now, she uses Liquid Fence and movement (jumping and yelling) to deter deer, rabbits and squirrels. Each spring she completes an ammonia drench and spreads Sluggo to prevent slugs and snails. She hand-picks and sprays for Japanese beetles when necessary. She fertilizes, when necessary, with Milorganite to also deter deer and root mulch to provide moisture retention and aesthetics.



Wood Tick Haven North is the undeveloped back land of the property that they have just begun to transform.



Monica shared a funny story about how Wood Tick Haven was named. During the expansion, they planted many trees and the day a delivery arrived, it was about to rain. Monica, Stephen and his son, Nickolas rushed out to plant them so they would get watered in. On the way back to the house, Monica heard a strange strangling noise. She whirled around to find Nickolas stripped down to his boxers, madly swiping at his body! Apparently, the weather had caused a ridiculous number of wood ticks to come out and despite being covered in bug spray, they were all covered in wood ticks! He was horrified! The introduction of turkey habitat and the turkeys, grouse and pheasants taking up residence has dramatically driven down the tick population, but the name was just too good to pass up to recall the incident.

Monica still works full-time as a shipping and logistics technician for Noble-X in the Premax department, so time is a huge factor. She notes that Stephen is her greatest supporter and he helps her often. They have a couple of friends who also help with heavy tractor work when needed, but otherwise, it's all on them.

Besides Stephen, Monica recognizes many people who have encouraged, supported and mentored her including Jeff White, Karen Dawson, John Pleschourt, Stephanie Gessler, Tomas Purintun, Sara Purintun, Tim and Pat Cuppini, Harold and Clara Kurschner, and Pearl and Steve Kurschner.

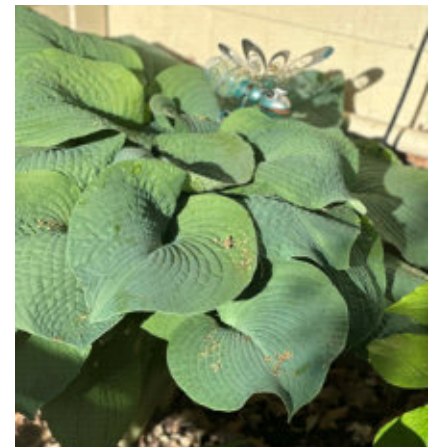
When she has any spare time, Monica enjoys crafting, reading, fishing and hunting, and she belongs to the Clear Lake Bow League. She has a cat that also serves as part-time rodent control named Buddy the Cat and Ellie-Belly, who is a Teddy-Malt breed dog. Her favorite public gardens to visit include the Anderson Japanese Garden in Rockford, IL, the Norskedalen Nature Center in Coon Valley, WI, and Dobson Park in Bayfield, WI.

During the winter months while the gardens are dormant, she enjoys crafting, ice fishing and attending concerts, with the blues being her preferred genre. She dreams about new garden ideas and plots where to plant her planned purchases. Future dreams include adding a small greenhouse and a screened house to WTHS. Monica also enjoys growing hosta seedlings. She became hooked on growing seeds when she grew some beautiful seedlings from seeds she purchased from Mike Vasey online, and favors his hosta line. Her favorite named hostas are *Hosta* 'June' and 'Liberty'.



H. 'Kinley's Love'

An unnamed hosta seedling that Monica grew from seed.



H. 'Clear Blue Lake'

She often uses her culled seedlings as annuals in pots throughout the gardens, while trying to evaluate their worthiness. If they keep her attention, they are protected for the winter. She enjoys growing seeds so much that she converted an old fuel oil tank room into a hosta seedling germinating paradise. Though there are more coming, she has only named two hosta originations- 'Kinley's Love' and 'Clear Blue Lake', which is the result of purchasing a "giant hosta package" from a catalog. She found the seedling growing between two of the giants and did not realize until many years later that it was a self-sowed seedling without a name. It survived four housing relocations to finally be settled in WTHS. Monica often offers her seedlings for sale to friends and on Facebook because they are worthy and she cannot cull them yet also cannot keep them all.

Monica employs a number of different methods for labeling her hostas including metal stakes with embossed labels, engraved labels, handwritten plastic markers, numbered plastic knives, and hand-painted rocks. The method she finds most effective and appealing is metal rose tag type markers with adhesive printed labels. She records her inventory in photograph books after photographing the entire garden at the end of each planting season. She circles each plant in the photo and numbers each circle, with the corresponding names hand-written on the back of the photo.

Monica's biggest garden regret is selling her house on three acres because she would love to have that prepared garden space now. She wishes she could relocate the maple trees currently planted near her house to WTHN to alleviate root competition near the house and allow for more hosta plantings. From trial and error, Monica suggests that hosta gardeners should place new hostas in their gardens keeping in mind their mature size to leave enough room for them to grow to maturity. Planning now saves the time of having to dig and thin them out later, when they are gaining size and looking fabulous. Annuals or potted plants can fill the void until they grow in. She noted that hosta liners are less expensive than mature plants and they become just as lovely given a bit of growth time, which helps the budget and allows for more purchases! She also noted that you can often plan to tuck small or miniature sized hostas between or under the giant and tall ones, which allows for more varieties to be planted. And for garden interest, taller plants can be planted between hostas to grow up over them, providing shade, contrast and color. Monica believes that every gardener should have a camera, a nice chair and a pull-behind garden cart.

Because Wood Tick Haven is young and ever-growing, it has never been featured on tour. Monica is a member of the American Hosta Society, the Midwest Regional Hosta Society and the Minnesota Hosta Society. She has attended a few events and recently won a few ribbons in a society sponsored leaf show. She loves having visitors and is open to hosting a tour. If you're ever in the area during the season, be sure to contact her for a visit. The gardens never look the same each year and there's always something new to see each year! Perhaps one year she will have gained the notoriety to be included in a society tour.

Contact Monica via email: Monicakurschner@gmail.com

Monica Kurschner Facebook/ Messenger page:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/18BWkSnKPP/?mibextid=wwXlfr>

Wood Tick Haven Facebook/Messenger page:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/1DqvVMCYQ9/?mibextid=wwXlfr>





Above, this tranquil water feature is surrounded with *Hosta* ‘Undulata Erromena’, ‘Undulata Albomarginata’, ‘The Razor’s Edge’, ‘Stand By Me’, and ‘Red October’.



Wood Tick Haven South is the area located closest to the home and is the tame, decorative side of the gardens. This is where they enjoy their hard work while relaxing.

Left, the bench is flanked by *H.* ‘Abiqua Moonbeam’ and ‘Foxfire Irish Moon’.



Left, while relaxing, Monica gazes at *H.* ‘Ben Vernooij’, ‘Parisian Silk’, ‘Deep Space Nine’, ‘Earth Angel’, ‘Halcyon’, ‘Blue Monday’, ‘Sum and Substance’, ‘Undulata Albomarginata’, and ‘Undulata Erromena’.

Right, American Bittersweet trails up over the arbor with unnamed hosta seedlings planted in the foreground for evaluation.

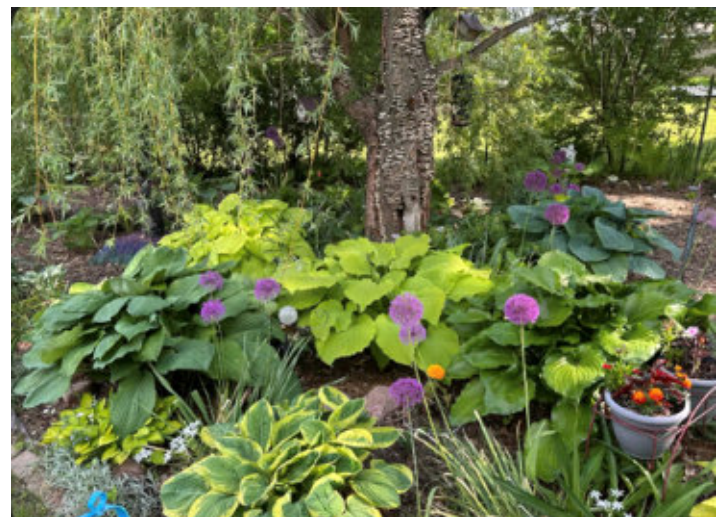


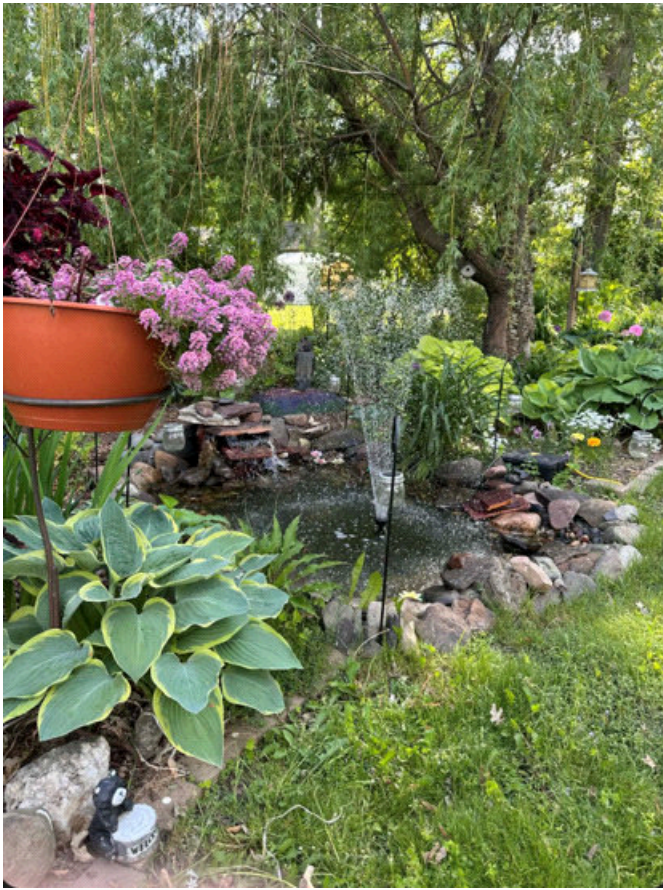


Left, the blue sail shade provides a bit of relief from the hot afternoon sun for the hostas planted amongst the many flowering perennials. Planted here are *Hosta* 'Kifukurin Ko Mame', 'Tom Terrific', 'Party Popper', 'Komodo Dragon', 'Hollywood Kings and Queens', 'Empress Wu', 'Risky Business' and 'Undulata Albomarginata'.



Left, the same space with lighting added, allows Monica and Stephen to enjoy the garden in the evening.





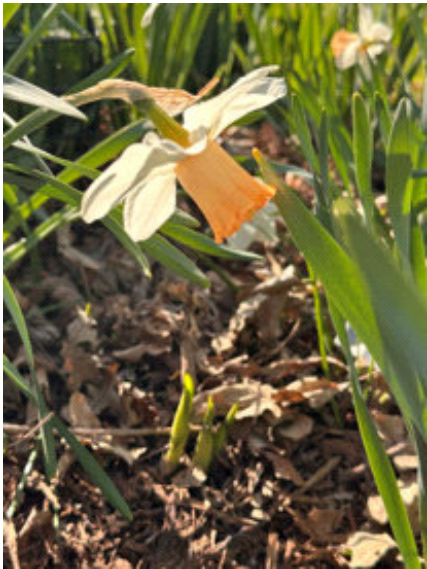
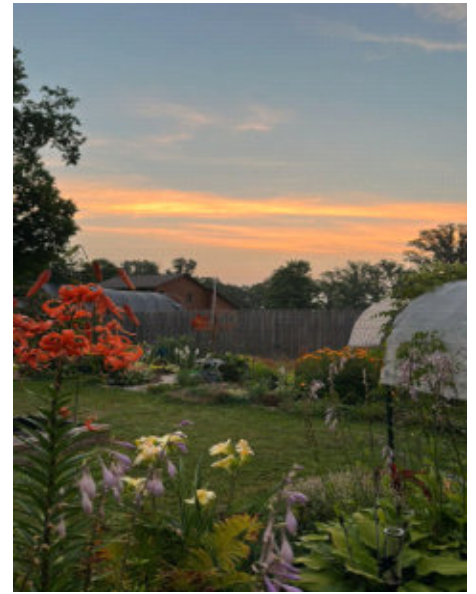
Left, a dwarf weeping larch serves as the backdrop for many hostas including *Hosta* 'Heart of Dixie', 'UFO', 'Erection', 'Monkey Business', 'Chiller', 'Tattooine', 'Emerald Coast', 'Shocking Mandy' and 'Night Flight'.



The red shade of this bee balm, or *Monarda*, provides a contrasting color pop that also attracts pollinators.

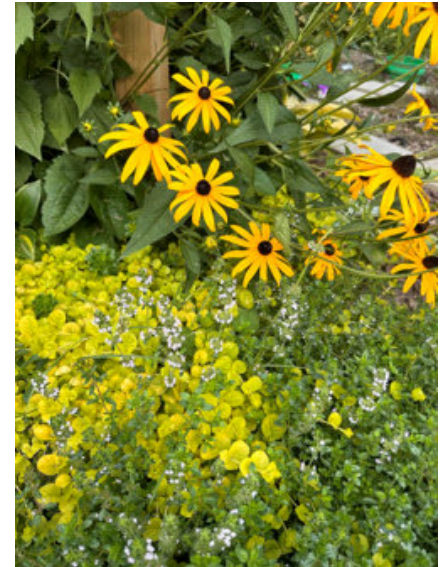
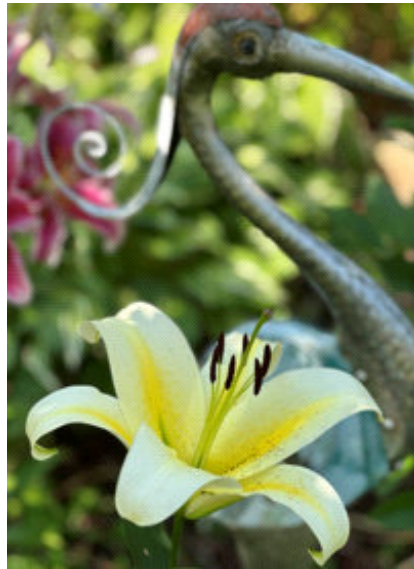


Lana (RIP) was a fantastic watch dog and companion. She is pictured here next to *Hosta* 'Eternal Flame'.



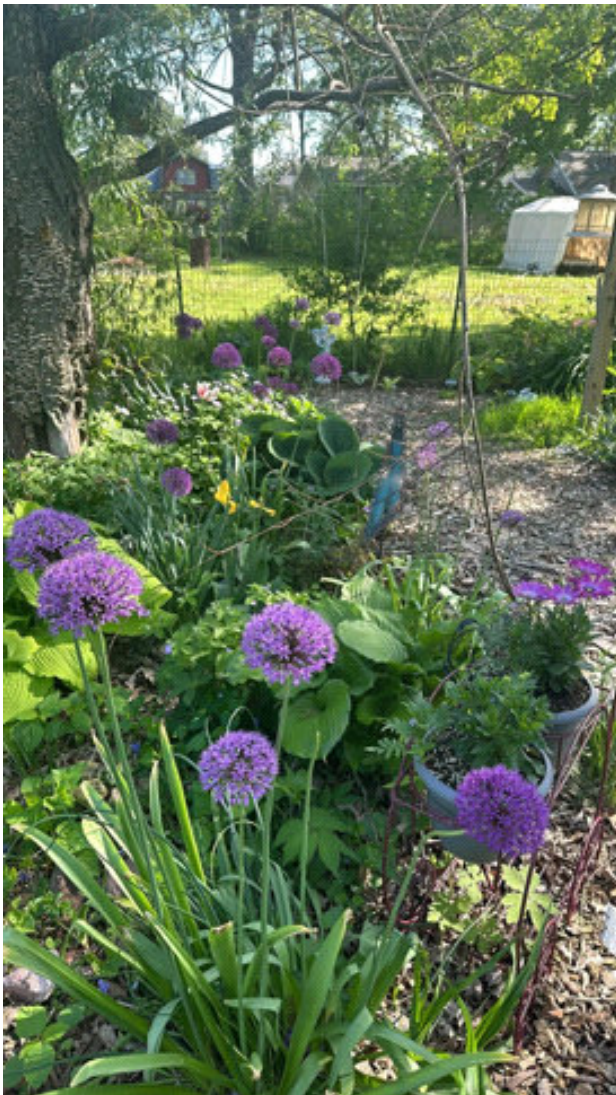
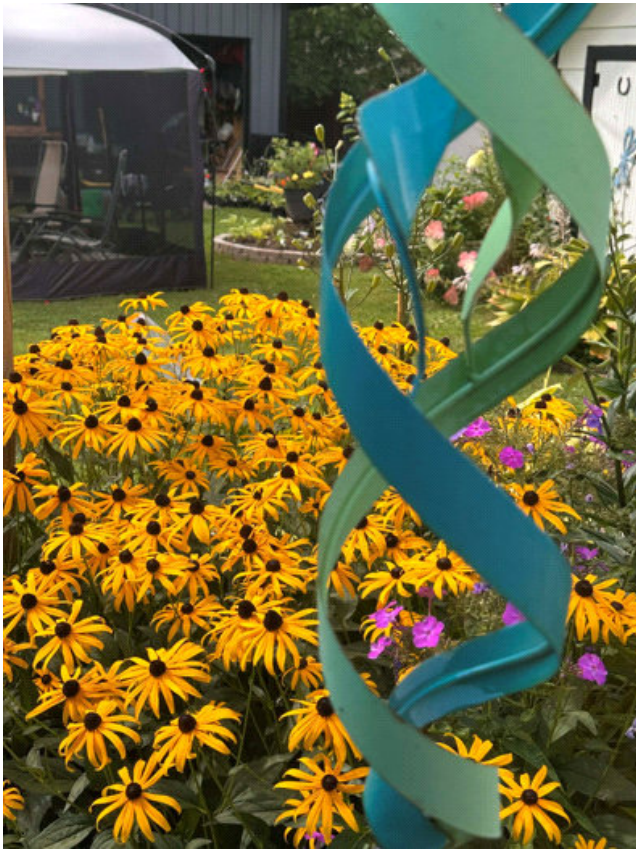
Left, a daffodil faces the emerging pips on *H.* 'June' as if anticipating its arrival.

Right, Mozart the heron poses proudly next to a lily blossom.



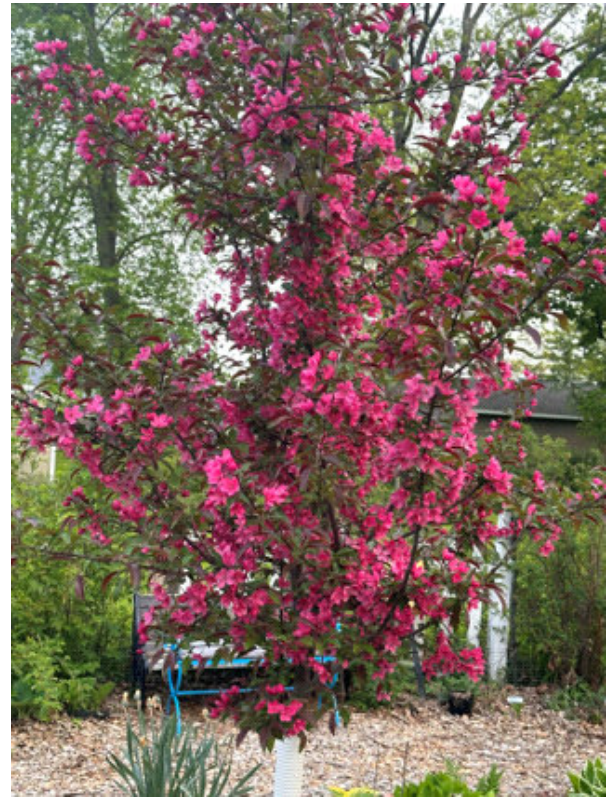
Below, few trees can compete with the sugar maple's fall color.





The garden path leads you past *Hosta* 'Chiller', 'Monkey Business', 'Tatooine', 'Clear Lake Blue' and 'Montana Moonshine'.

Left, *Allium* 'Globemaster' boldly accents this bed including *Hosta* 'Choo Choo Train', 'Effervescence', 'Clear Lake Blue', 'Saint Elmo's Fire', 'Mean Gene', 'Blue Ivory', 'All that Jazz', 'Royal Tiara', and 'Jelly Bean'.



A crab apple tree provides an excellent source of color in the spring garden.



This newly planted bed will surely fill in nicely including *H.* 'Clear Lake Blue', 'September Sun', 'Irish Luck', 'Dawn's Early Light', 'Choo Choo Train', 'Phantom', 'Chorus Girl', and 'Carnival'.



Like the water on these handmade cement-cast hosta leaves, the hostas spill out into the gardens and fill the spaces in.



Right, *H.* 'Dancing Queen'.



H. 'Afterglow'



A pathway filled with hostas including *H.* ‘Majesty’, ‘Devil’s Advocate’, ‘Touch of Class’, ‘Abiqua Moonbeam’, ‘Paradigm’, ‘Old Glory’, ‘Blazing Saddles’ and many unnamed seedlings.

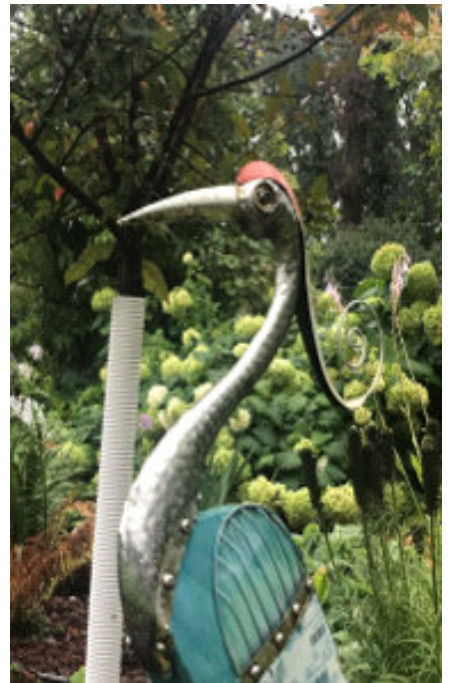
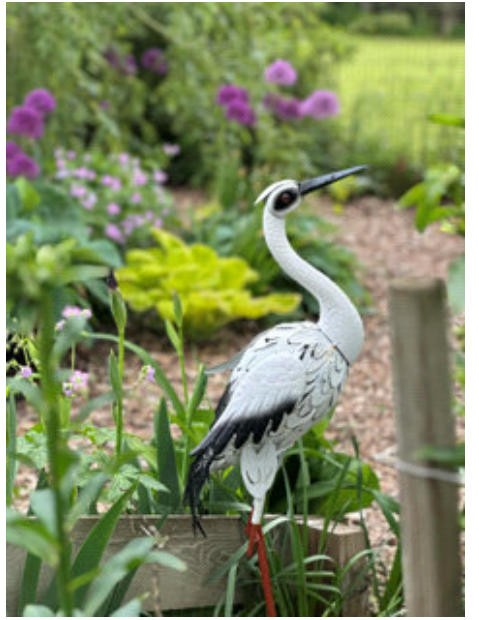


A bed of small hostas accented by a huge boulder resembling a guitar case including *H.* ‘Popcorn’, ‘Color Festival’, ‘Avocado’, ‘Golden Tiara’, ‘Emerald Tiara’, ‘Erotica’, ‘Frozen Margarita’, and ‘Million Dollar Baby’.



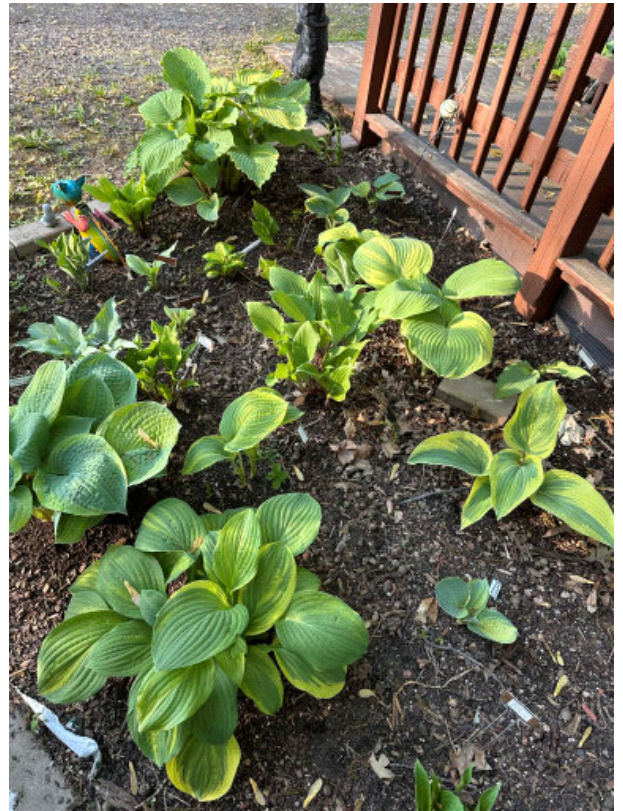
Garden art allows gardeners to insert a bit of their personality into the landscape, making each garden unique! In Wisconsin’s climate, this is especially important because the gardens are dormant for such a long time that the garden whimsy may be all you can enjoy for a while.







Right, a bed of unnamed hosta seedlings near the deck.

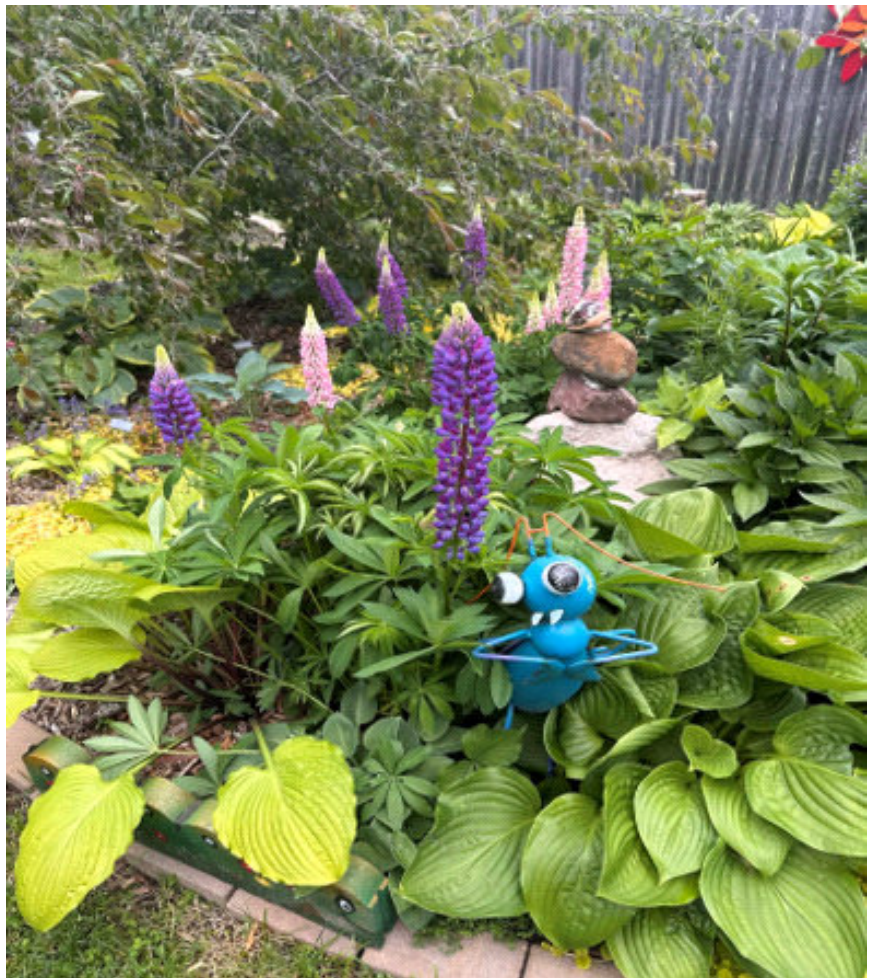


Left, *H.* 'Clear Lake Blue' has excellent blue wax color in spring.

Below, colorful lupines provide a color contrast for *H.* 'Angel Falls', 'Tom Terrific', 'Komodo Dragon' and 'Dancing Queen'.

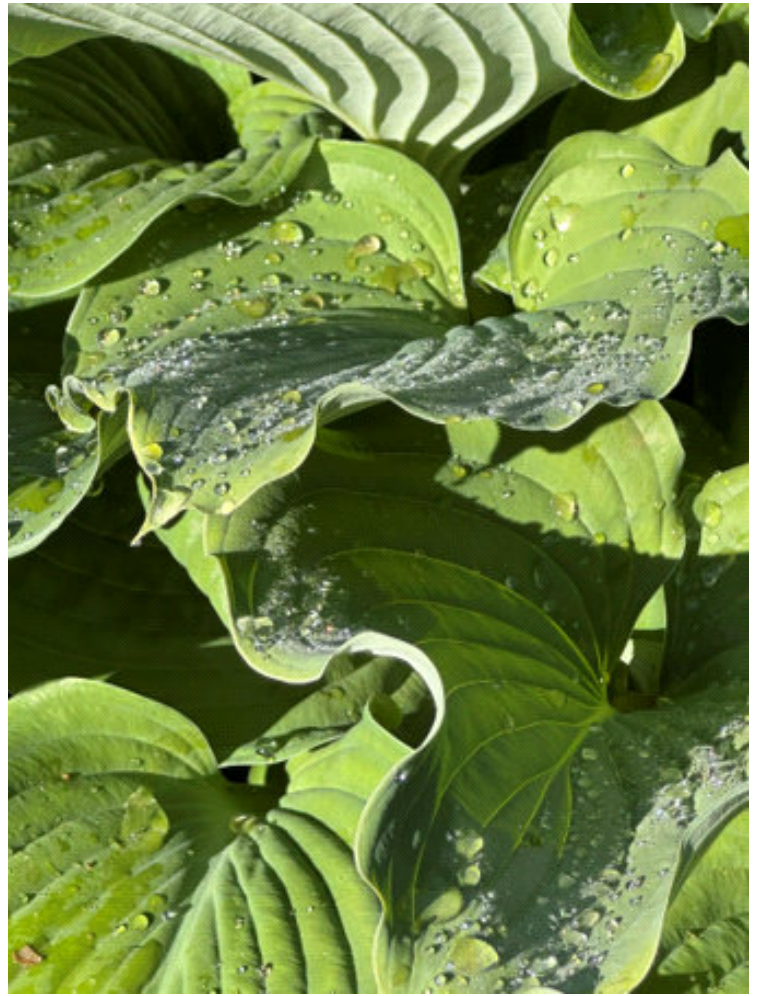


H. 'Fire Island' glows a gorgeous yellow shade with a hint of red tones when it emerges in spring.





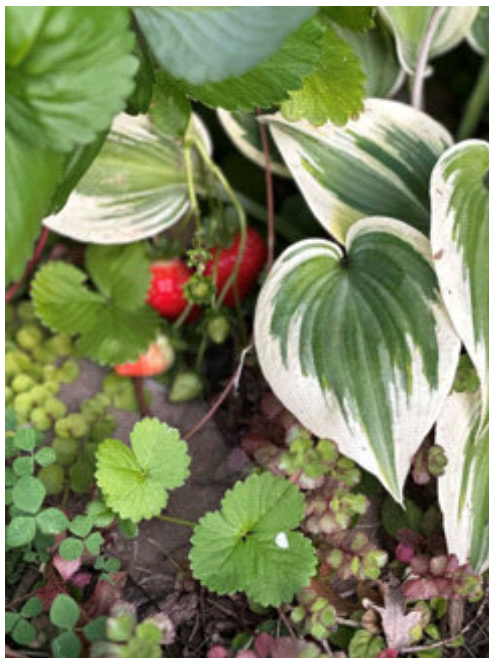
An unnamed hosta seedling catches all the rainwater from the gargoyle downspout.



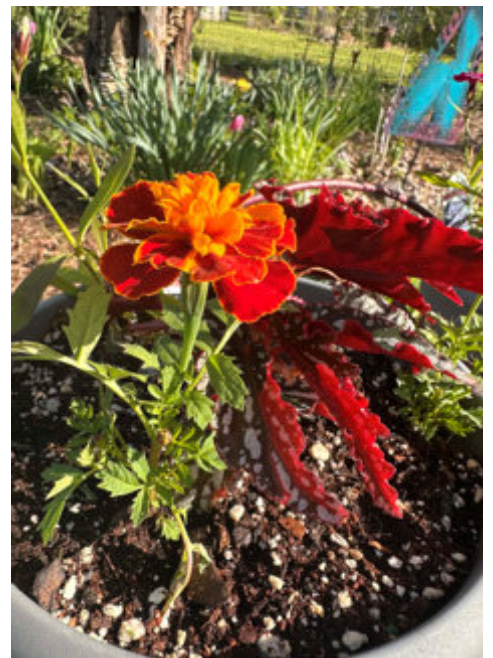
Closeup of raindrops on *H.* 'Clear Lake Blue'.



A fairy rests beside *H.* 'Alex Summers'.



Strawberries grow beneath *H.* 'First Frost'.



Planting marigolds in your garden is a method of natural pest control.



Left, a fairy rests between *H.* 'Pearly Gates' and 'Merlin' with a few seedlings.



Left, a fairy rests between *H.* 'Pearly Gates' and 'Merlin' with a few seedlings.



Garden phlox, liatris and black-eyed Susans provide a backdrop for *H.* 'Echo the Sun' and 'Risky Business'.

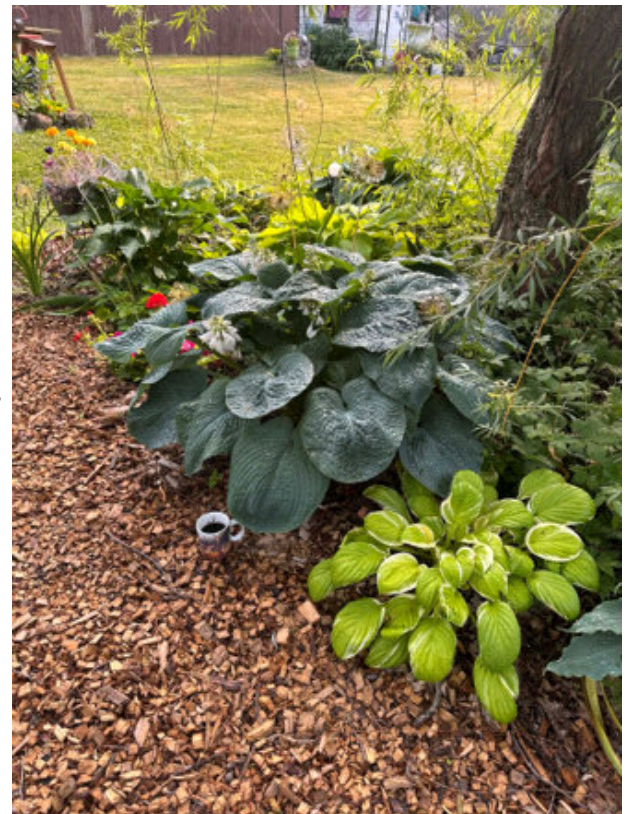


A new bed that Monica has dubbed "Vasey Corner" includes recent introductions *H.* 'House of Wax', 'Carnival of Souls' and 'Forbidden Planet'. Because there was extra space, she also planted 'Speakeasy', 'Night Owl', 'Vanilla Cream' and 'Faithful Heart'.

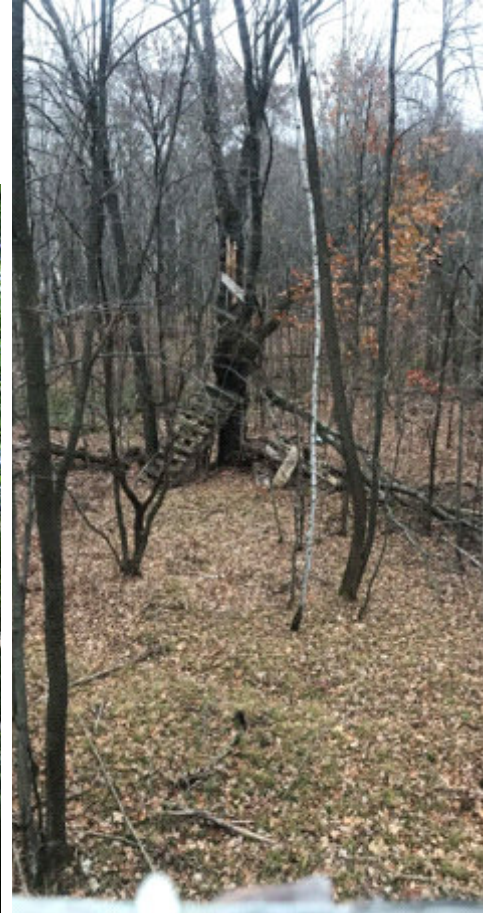


Left, a miniature fairy garden bowl includes *H.* 'Blue Mouse Ears' and 'Cracker Crumbs' with some sedum.

Right, *H.* 'Clear Lake Blue' towers over the chartreuse 'Saint Elmo's Fire' with 'Neptune', 'Irish Luck', and 'Choo Choo Train' nearby.



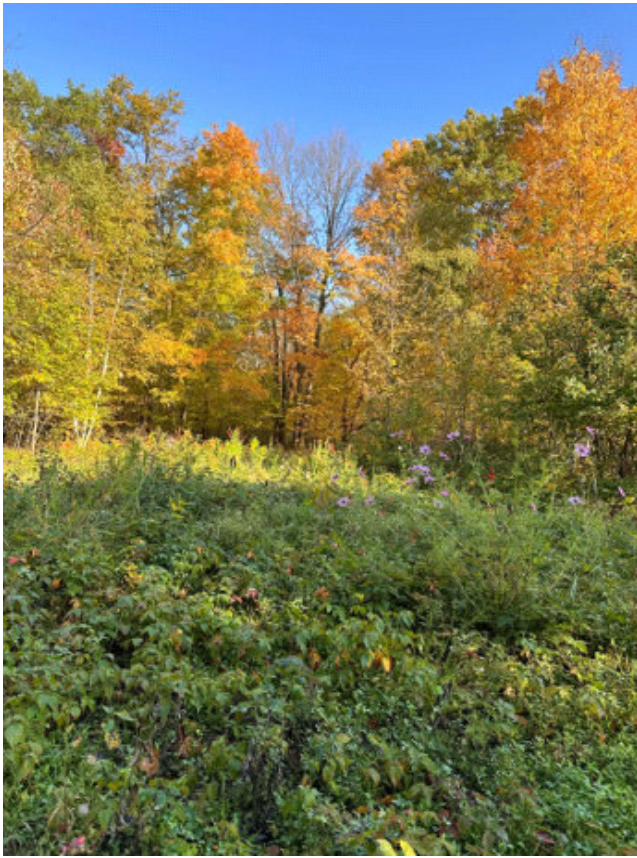
Now we take a walk to the wild side, known as Wood Tick Haven North. Monica and Stephen are working hard to tame the wilderness to create more beautiful gardens.



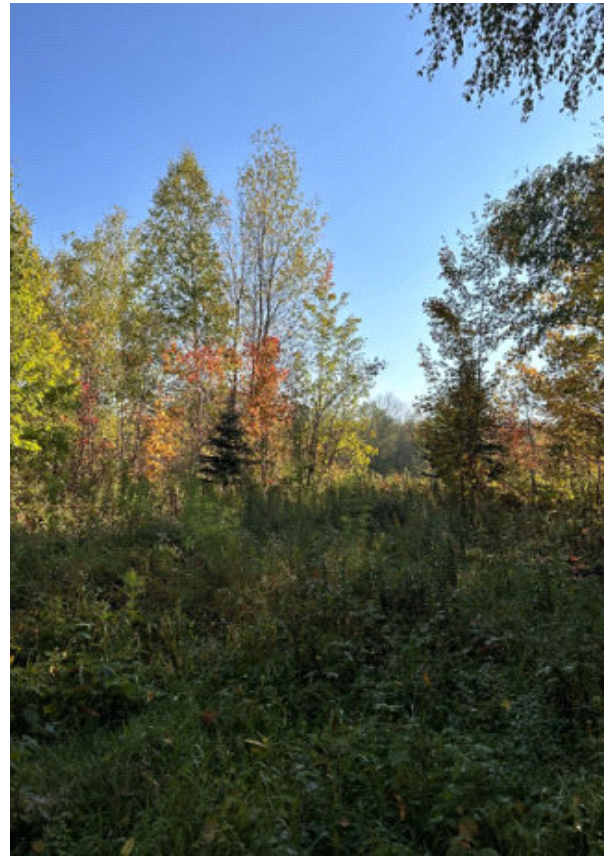
An arch is placed where the pollinator garden will begin.

Trees are cleared from a future walkway path.

An old treehouse stands in ruins in the forest.



If you zoom in on the photo on the left, you can see why it's hard work to reclaim this field, as it's blanketed in poison ivy!



A good friend works with his tractor to clear and cultivate the land to make space for native plantings, pollinators, hostas and other desirable perennials.





As the land is cultivated and ready for growth, Stephen and Monica toss wildflower seeds and transplant hostas and other varieties of trees and perennials to create a natural woodland garden to walk through. Borders and beds take shape as walking paths are outlined and maintained.



Monica's son Tomas often helps with gardening chores, and is tossing seeds in the field.



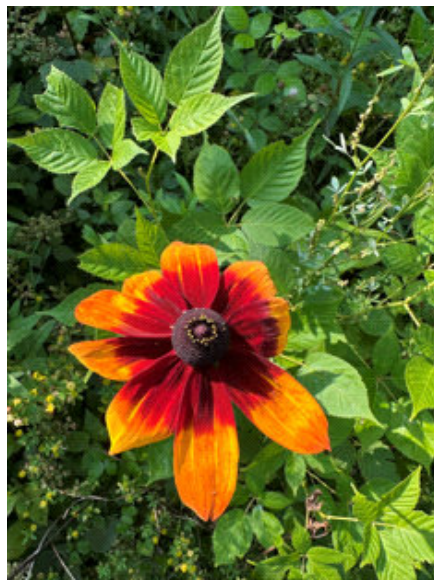
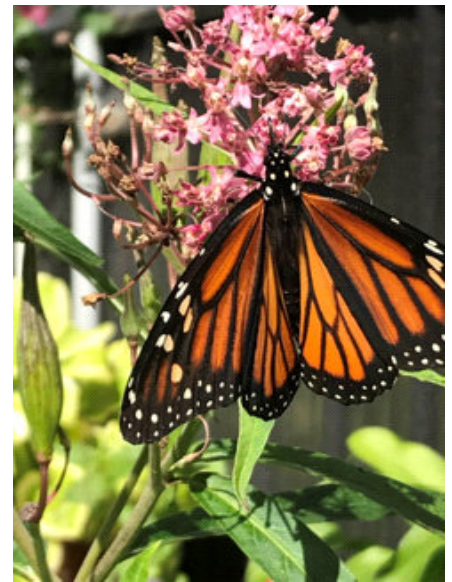
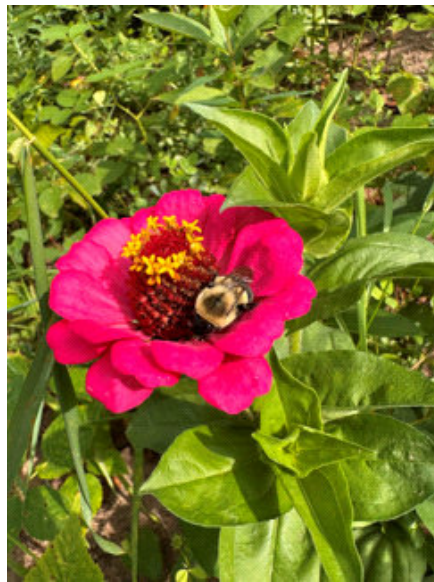


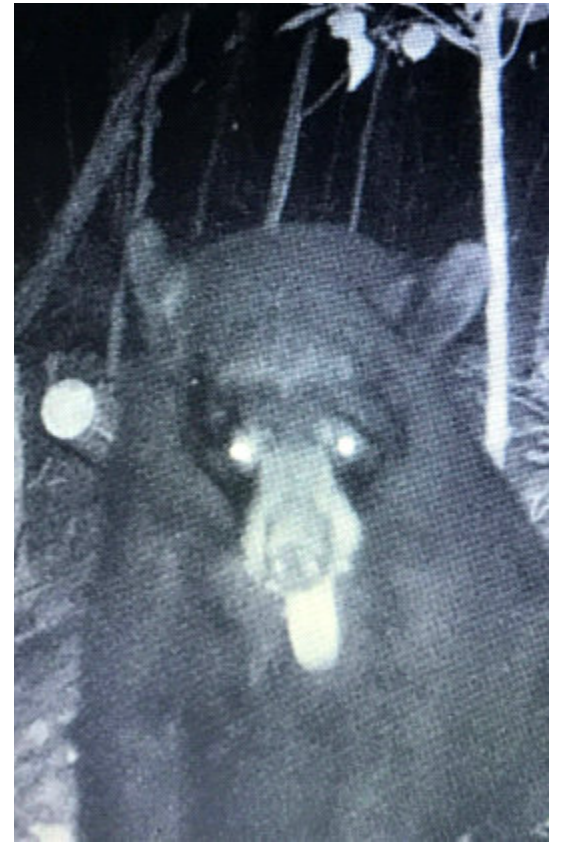
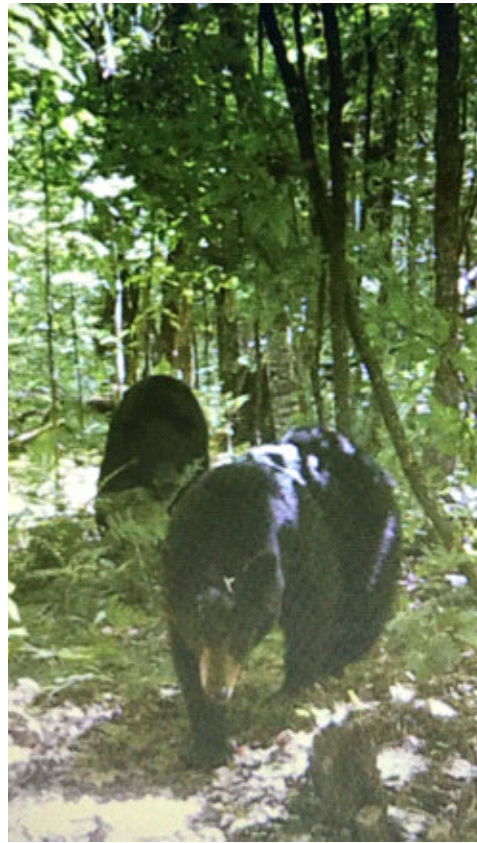
Wood Tick Haven North has some marshy bog areas that create the perfect support for hosta beds. Wildlife is naturally attracted to the water source, and native plantings mimic the natural environment that they have altered to create an accessible, enjoyable walking space.



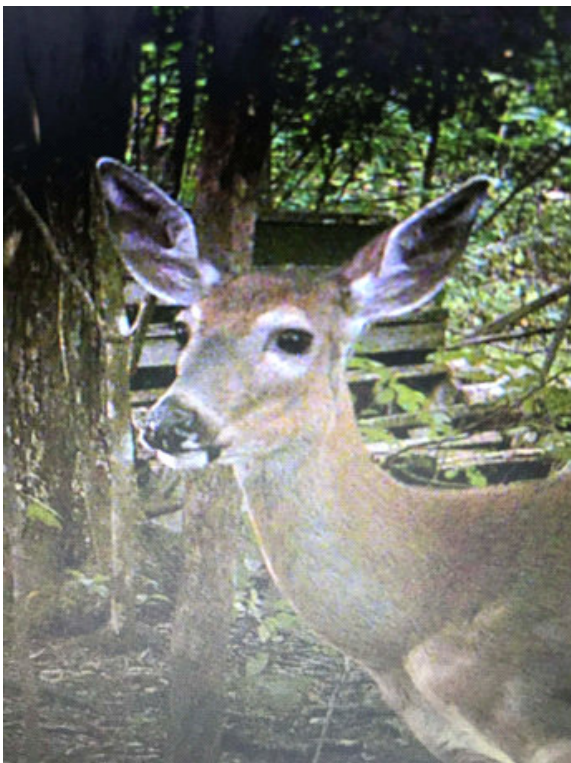


Native plantings and flowering plants to attract pollinators are the focus in Wood Tick Haven North. It is also the overflow space for hostas that will not fit in near the house.





Strategically placed trail cameras capture the wilderness in action! The night-time infrared photos reveal the black bears scrounging and a raccoon digging for a tasty treat. While they might not be welcome, it is not unusual to find them in their natural habitat. Hopefully they leave the new plantings alone!



Other wildlife captured on film include the owl and deer. The owl can serve as vole patrol and is a welcome sight. The deer, on the other hand, is definitely not a welcome sight, as they will destroy all the hostas overnight. Fencing is impractical in this large undeveloped area, so Monica uses deterrents and often chases them away herself when she can.

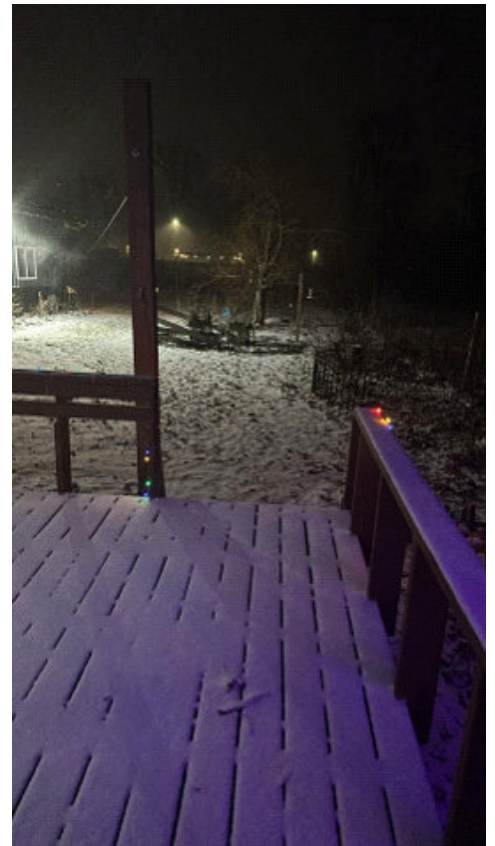




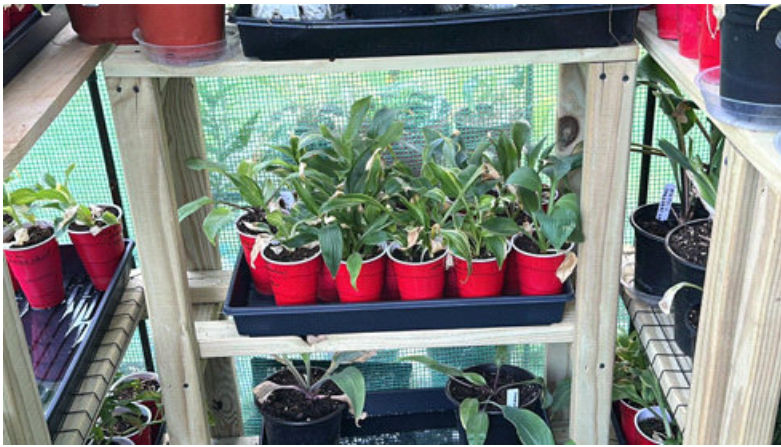
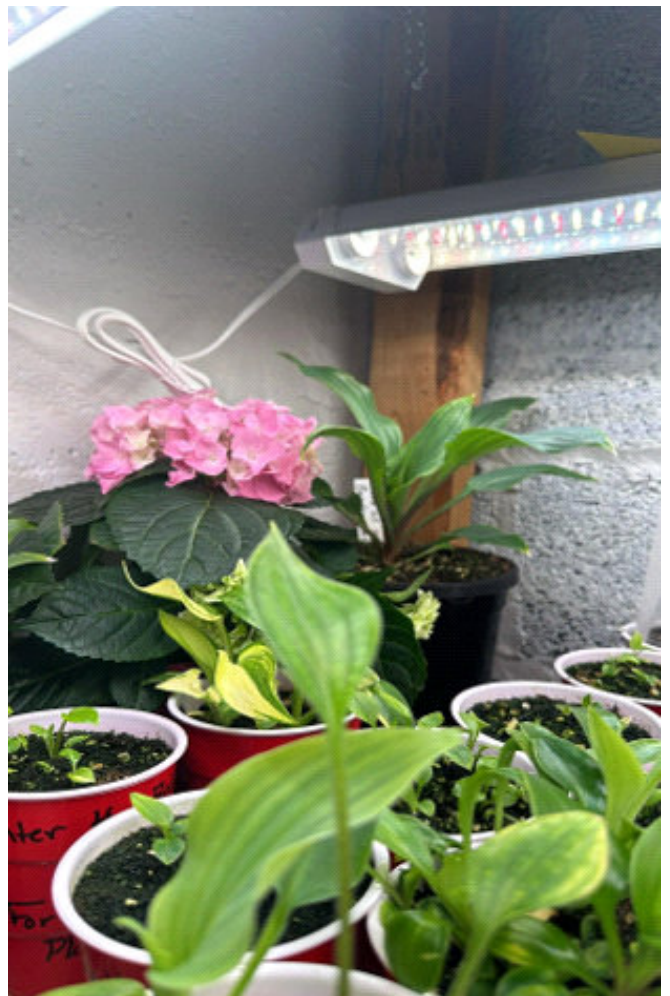
Monica propagates as many plants as she can herself to save on the cost of stocking the gardens. She grows many annual varieties of plants from seed over the winter, which saves a ton of money over buying flats in spring.



Left, while Monica is busy with seedlings in the spring, Stephen steps out to the lake to get in a little spring therapy fishing!



Above, the first snow of the season is the harbinger of the long months without growth in the gardens. To keep the spirit alive, Monica grows seeds indoors which she plans to plant in the gardens as soon as possible in the spring.



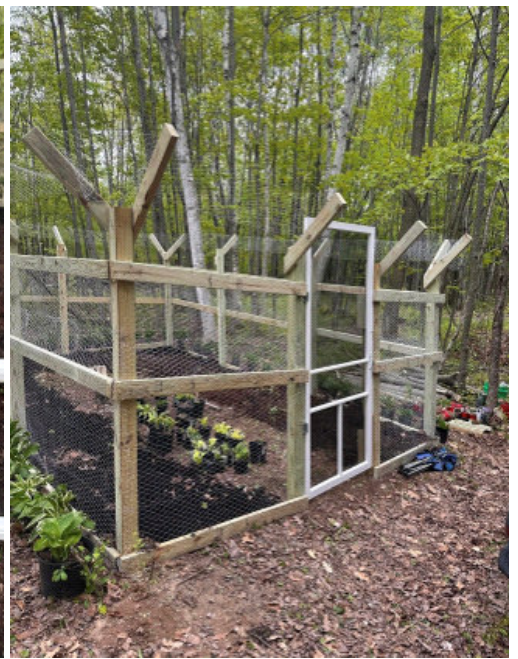
Over the long Wisconsin winters, Monica has begun to grow hosta seeds to create new varieties of hostas. She hand pollinates hostas while in bloom to harvest her own crosses in autumn and also purchases seeds from others with hosta genes that she does not own. As the seedlings grow and are ready to be planted outside, she makes beds to grow them for evaluation.





Hosta seedlings in every size, shape and color are planted wherever there is space available in the gardens. As they grow, Monica evaluates them for future introduction.





As more hostas are planted in Wood Tick Haven North, Monica is faced with the dilemma of pest damage. She is unable to completely fence in the area to keep deer out due to the vast size and is unable to always be present due to daily life activities such as work and sleeping! This spring, they built this enclosure to protect the hostas.

Below, Monica hides in the willow watching for destructive critters!



Right, rabbits are also pests that plague hostas, especially when they are young plants. Monica has decided to place a net of chicken wire over newly planted varieties back here to protect them. Because they are so young and small, they may not recover if they are repeatedly attacked.





With the large expanse of land yet to be cleared and developed, the photo gallery you've just scrolled through is just the beginning of Wood Tick Haven!

Established in 1998, with a future so bright, keep your eyes peeled for new development from Monica and Stephen. There's a whole new crop of hosta seedlings awaiting evaluation and eventual release, and generations of seedlings to be planted. All great gardens begin as dreams that flourish with hard work and dedication. One day you might be touring Wood Tick Haven during an annual convention, and you'll be able to reflect on its transformation with this knowledge of its beginning.



This interview was conducted and compiled by Gail J Russo, Cedarville, NJ.

If you would like to see your garden or the garden of a friend featured in this publication, please contact Gail Russo at Russo4@comcast.net for the application questionnaire.

All the photos printed in this column have been provided by the featured gardener with their permission, unless otherwise noted, and are the property of the featured gardener, so contact them if you'd like permission to use a photo.

We are trying to bring lovely, remote gardens to the readers who would not be able to see them otherwise and get to know the person behind them.

International hosta gardeners are encouraged to join us. We would love to meet you and enjoy your gardens, but you must communicate in English.



Vendor Spotlight

Gail Russo, Cedarville, New Jersey

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Hostas Store.

It sounds to the point and pretty basic. But what you will find when you visit this online store is far beyond basic. Specializing in rare and hard-to-find hostas, this nursery is a collector's dream and the pricing is amazing! Tucked away in Hollandale, Minnesota, a part of the country well known to hosta aficionados, Mike Dammen and Renee Thies have worked together to maintain this specialty nursery for the past 18 years.



Mike purchased the home on one acre of land in 1989 and like most new homeowners, he set out to landscape the property. Mike found four common varieties of hostas, including *Hosta* ‘Honeybells’ and ‘Undulata’ at local garden centers and in plant catalogs. Because they grew well, over the course of five years, he became obsessed with dividing and transplanting those four plants into hundreds! In 2000, he discovered the internet and learned that many more varieties of hostas existed, and he began collecting them. Because he had so many divisions of the original four, he experimented with selling them on eBay and they sold well. In retrospect, this is what shaped and defined his future.

Mike was working full time as a commercial printer, but he truly despised the job. He loved coming home after work to tend his gardens and divide his hostas to sell online. In 2008, he learned that Shady Oaks Nursery, in Waseca, MN was selling tissue culture liners wholesale and was only an hour’s drive away. This nugget of information is what set his plan for the future in motion. He decided he was going to open a hosta nursery, chose the name The Hosta Store and made certain that everything was official. He called the Minnesota nursery licensing agency and requested an inspection of his hostas and his property. The inspection was successful, with the inspector commenting about the very healthy and beautiful hosta stock. Mike recalls the inspector’s exact words as he was departing, “Do not quit your day job as there is a lot of competition in the nursery business.” Despite this warning, as the inspector made a right turn exactly three tenths of a mile down the gravel road, Mike had his employer on the phone giving them his two-weeks’ notice, as he did not want to work in that business even a second longer than he had to. Two weeks later, the nursery was his new full-time job, twelve hours per day, 7 days a week!

Because hostas are seasonal, Mike realized he needed to branch out to sustain sales and pay the bills. He chose to propagate the Austree willow tree (*Salix matsudana* × *alba*), a deciduous fast-growing shade or windbreak tree, growing to a hundred feet tall, with six to fifteen feet of growth per season! It thrives in planting hardiness zones 4-9 and is adaptable to a wide variety of soil conditions, including wet, flood-prone areas where other tree varieties might rot. He had purchased one in 1989, and it was growing well in his climate. He could root cuttings and send fresh cuttings to Southern states during winter and early spring. He also chose the herb business, where he could plant seeds and root cuttings in the fall to sell in early spring.

Mike met Renee Thies in 2011, and she moved into his life and homestead. She worked for a chiropractor, but shared Mike’s passion for gardening. She began assisting him with nursery duties when she was not working.

Mike purchased several hundred hosta liners from Shady Oaks before they ceased operations, when he switched to Walters Gardens. In 2016, he discovered Jim’s Hostas and became obsessed with “different” hostas. He purchased hundreds of dollars worth of the most rare, unusual and expensive hostas he could find before Jim Schwartz closed his doors that same year. Mike began to believe that rare and expensive was the way to go, as these hostas generally cannot be reproduced in tissue culture and hold their value. He switched his focus to propagating hostas with heavily twisted foliage, streaked foliage, misted foliage, heavily corrugated foliage and foliage that changes coloration through the growing season, and he began to source these varieties from other nurseries and private collectors. He became especially fascinated with *Hosta* ‘Striptease’ and its many sports and began collecting the entire family. He recently decided to cease operating the herb

business and has started experimenting with hybridizing hostas and growing hostas from seed instead of sowing herbs in the fall/winter months.



Mike's hosta collection has grown to 1,500 named varieties and The Hosta Store offers between 400 and 900 of these varieties for sale throughout the year, dependent upon availability through natural propagation by division and demand for the unusual. When Mike purchased his property, located in Plant Hardiness Zone 4, it was drained swampland - rich, black, fertile peat soil, and slightly acidic. He amended it with rotted wood chip soil, creating a mix that hostas thrive in. All the hostas at Hostas Store are grown in the ground and are dug upon sale right before shipping. To maintain his inventory of rare varieties, Mike has a strict rule he follows that he must have at least six divisions of a variety grown to maturity before he offers it for sale. This is why the number of varieties for sale differs greatly and is always changing. You can't rush natural propagation, and he refuses to list a variety for sale before its root system is fully mature and stable.

To prevent the spread of Hosta Virus X (HVX), Mike randomly chooses varieties to test each year using Agdia test strips and he keeps several knives and shovels in the garden areas, so they don't get used again before being sanitized after each use. Mike has never seen nematode damage in his gardens. Mike prefers to keep the garden as organic as possible because they have a multitude of pollinators, amphibians and birds that visit the gardens. When absolutely necessary, he will spread metaldehyde to control slugs and snail damage.



Mike's biggest antagonist is a gopher, and he shared a funny story. "I felt as if I was the actor Bill Murray in the movie 'Caddyshack' as I attempted to get rid of the gopher. I believe the gopher left with a smile on his face as the varmint moseyed out of the yard with his middle claw pointed in my direction!

The contract exterminator will set four traps for \$400. I did not hire him as I can do that myself. I purchased multiple nice traps and carefully buried them in the ground hole runs. I filled the traps with their recommended favorite foods - a variety of foods in case the gopher's eating desires were luxury delicacies. One of their luxury foods is dandelion roots! A few days later I noticed new tunnels made to go around the traps. Like a short detour on a road during construction. I then purchased all types of poisonous foods and filled the tunnels with them. I smoked the tunnels with smoke bombs. I ran around stabbing the ground multiple times with my pitchfork, and then a new tunnel showed up! I dumped hundreds of dollars worth of castor oil on the ground where I thought the tunnel runs were.

When the tunnels traveled in the ditch, I drove erratically with my skid steer, trying to smash them. I removed several rows of hostas and relocated them. Then I could use the bucket on the skid steer to smash the ground. I hooked up my sump pump hoses to the exhaust of my car and ran the exhaust through the tunnels. At this point, I really felt like Bill Murray's character role.

The one thing that did seem to work after three weeks was using my three-quarter horsepower sump pump to drain my deep pond dry into the tunnels. Pumping millions of gallons of water over several days into the gopher runs. Luckily, it was a dry fall and the hostas benefitted from the water. Perhaps a bit too much water, as the water trapped the varmint in a small location. I would take an afternoon nap and wake up to find panic survival mode new tunnels had been dug. The varmint was smart, as it did not dig while I quietly watched the ground for movement. I also had the garden hose shoved in the holes, with the water turned on full force. The varmint finally left, completely waterlogged, with a full stomach of expensive rare hostas in his tummy. And I'm sure, with that smirk still on his face!"



Photo by Jola Kedra used with permission from Pexels.com

Mike and Renee are both retired from jobs outside their nursery now, and they both spend six months out of the year working ten hours per day, every day in their nursery gardens. The other half of the year still requires a minimum of two hours per day tending seedlings and performing updates and maintenance to their website and inventory. They do not have any employees and also keep a common size vegetable garden for their own use.

Mike's hobby is his interest in extreme meteorology. He loves chasing tornadoes, which are a frequent occurrence in southern Minnesota, and Renee often chases with him! He boasts that his all-time best was filming a total of 23 combined funnels and tornadoes in a single day, which coincidentally was the day that Minnesota set its all-time

record number of documented tornadoes in a single day. He filmed six additional tornadoes that they had not even accounted for or documented that day. He enjoys studying the extreme weather patterns we have been experiencing across our country. And from what I have personally witnessed, he has plenty to investigate!



Photos taken by Mike of tornadoes near his home and below, a hailstorm in progress that he was able to capture.



On the hailstorm day, Charles Peek from The Weather Channel was also chasing storms and stopped for a photograph with Mike. Charles had a drone in the sky catching the hail fog as it melted!

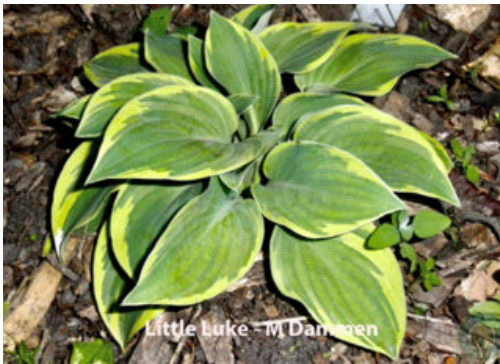
Right, Mike with his family left to right: daughter Michelle Merryman, granddaughter Riley Merryman, Mike Dammen, Renee Thies, daughter-in-law Makayla Dammen, son Kyle Dammen, grandson Miles Dammen, son-in-law Drew Merryman, grandson Luke Merryman and grandson Noah Merryman in the center stealing the show!



Mike and Renee each have children from prior relationships and Mike's son has taken an interest in the business on a small-scale learning curve. Mike hopes one day to pass it all on to him. He has no plans for future additions, as he is out of space! When Renee visits her relatives in Oakland, California, she always saves time to visit her favorite public garden, The Oakland Botanical Gardens. Mike prefers to stay local and chase tornadoes when he's not in the gardens.

When there aren't any tornadoes to chase, Mike enjoys playing with "old-school" games such as Lite-Brite and he practices magic tricks to entertain his grandchildren when they visit. He keeps a vintage toy-vending machine stocked so the children can each get a new small toy when they visit.

When Mike closed the herb side of the business, he chose to use that time to grow hosta seeds instead. He purchased many seeds online in the fall and was successful at growing some beauties. He's recently begun to hybridize hostas by selectively hand pollinating certain varieties. He then grows those crosses over the winter and evaluates the seedlings to see if they are garden worthy. A few notable seedlings he has registered include *Hosta* 'Little Luke', 'In Living Color' and 'Jumping Jacks'.



H. 'Little Luke', named for his grandson.



H. 'In Living Color'



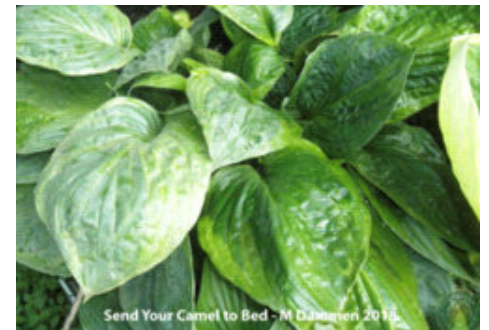
H. 'Jumping Jacks'



H. 'Green Ghost' in spring coloration.



H. 'Orange Sunburst'



H. 'Send Your Camel to Bed'



H. 'Orange Twist'

Mike believes it's because the soil is so rich, moist and fertile that he finds a multitude of sports growing on many of his rare hosta varieties. He has registered many of them and offers 41 of his registered seedlings and sports for sale on their website. A few notable sports he has registered include *H.* Green Ghost', 'Orange Sunburst', 'Send Your Camel to Bed' and 'Orange Twist'.

Mike and Renee are members of the AHS, and their nursery has been toured by The Shades of Green Hosta Society. However, because their property is only an acre including a decent size pond, they can only accommodate up to a dozen people at a time. Mike recently met fellow hosta hybridizer Charles Kwick during a tour. He was impressed with many of Charles' introductions and agreed to offer many of his for sale on the Hostas Store website. He was so impressed, that he introduced Charles to Bob Solberg, owner of Green Hill Hostas during a hosta event. Bob has offered to place some of the Kwick introductions into tissue culture and offer them through his nursery. Mike offers many of them for sale too. If you have an original unique sport or seedling that you'd like to introduce without the use of tissue culture, consider contacting Mike and Renee to see if they find it unique enough to offer it for you through their website.

Hostas Store is a nursery that is not open to the public but can be toured by contacting Mike via email or Messenger to make arrangements. Hostas Store operates primarily through its webpage, which is updated frequently and available every day of the year. Shipping is offered in the continental USA beginning in early spring- as early as he can dig in the ground. Shipping is of bareroot plants for a flat rate of \$9.00 per order. Free shipping is offered on orders of \$100 and over, year-round. Inventory is updated frequently as plants are deemed ready for sale and he reduces the price of varieties that he has a multitude of, as space in the garden is limited. Hosta enthusiasts should certainly check the website often as new varieties are offered frequently. Hostas Store has rapidly grown in the past few years and many of its customers are repeat buyers who claim the hostas they receive are the healthiest and best plants they have ever received through the mail, for less than reasonable prices. Mike Dammen is gaining a reputation and following, as one of the up-and-coming hybridizers with his recent introductions.

As Mike and Renee are frequently in the garden, the best way to reach them is via email: Info@hostas-store.com

Hostas Store maintains a Facebook page where many of Mike's stories and photos of hostas soon to be offered can be found:

<https://www.facebook.com/share/14fYmjYwxKm/?mibextid=wwXIfr>

<https://austrees.com/>

<https://hostas-store.com/>

Mike and Renee also communicate via Messenger through the Facebook page with customers and are quick to reply, but email is best.

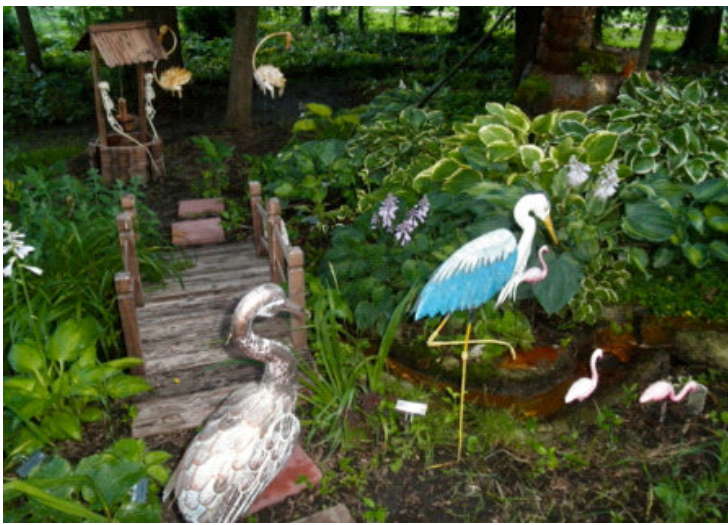
Scroll through the gardens below to catch a glimpse of the hostas you can hope to purchase online from Hostas Store.



Mike was bored when he first retired from his day job and decided to build the wooden walkway around the garden just for fun! It also helps keep the house cleaner since the soil is often damp and sticks to the shoes.

The porch swing offers a fun way to relax after a hard day's work.





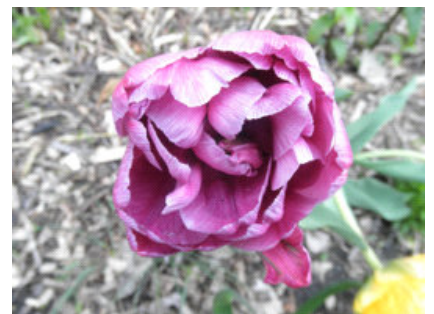
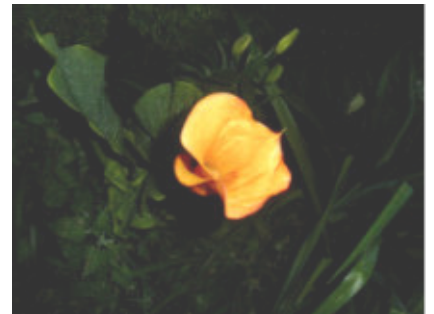
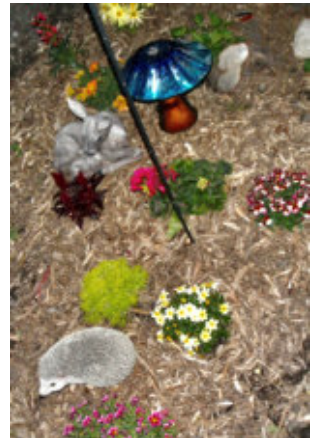
Statues of birds adorn the gardens, but only the ones that can't naturally be there due to geography and climate. The gardens are full of real birds too, as shown below.



Attracting birds to the gardens is a natural form of pest control as many of them consume insects that would damage the plants in the gardens.



Planting a variety of flowers amidst the hostas in the garden attracts the birds, insects and pollinators that keep the garden healthy and pest free.

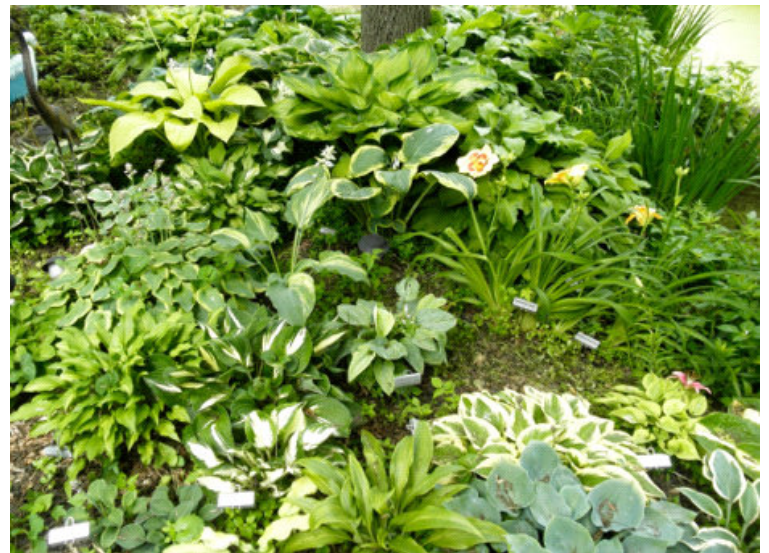




A colorful grouping of hostas near the pond including *H.* 'Monsoon', 'Aloha', 'Smooth Sailing', 'Alligator Shoes' and 'Abiqua Drinking Gourd'.



As hostas are divided for future sales, they are planted in rows until they reach maturity when they are listed for sale. Once sold, the division is dug, washed and wrapped for shipping.



A display bed including *H.* 'Parisian Silk', 'Continental Divide', 'Independence', 'American Sweetheart', 'Guardian Angel', 'Millennium', 'Dawn's Early Light', 'All that Jazz' and 'Final Summation'.



A patch of seedlings under observation. Each of these seedlings show different patterns of coloration, and different shades of color, yet all are open pollinated seedlings from *H.* 'Beautiful Night'.



Left, Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) is one herb Mike chose to grow when he started growing herbs. Each red berry contains two seeds. The seeds must be stratified in sand boxes for 18 months before germination. Seeds are harvested in late August and when ready, Mike would sell them worldwide. His stratification of the seeds saves growers the trouble, which they gladly pay for. Seeds must be planted immediately after stratification, as they mold quickly. Plants must be grown in shade, and the root is also quite profitable.

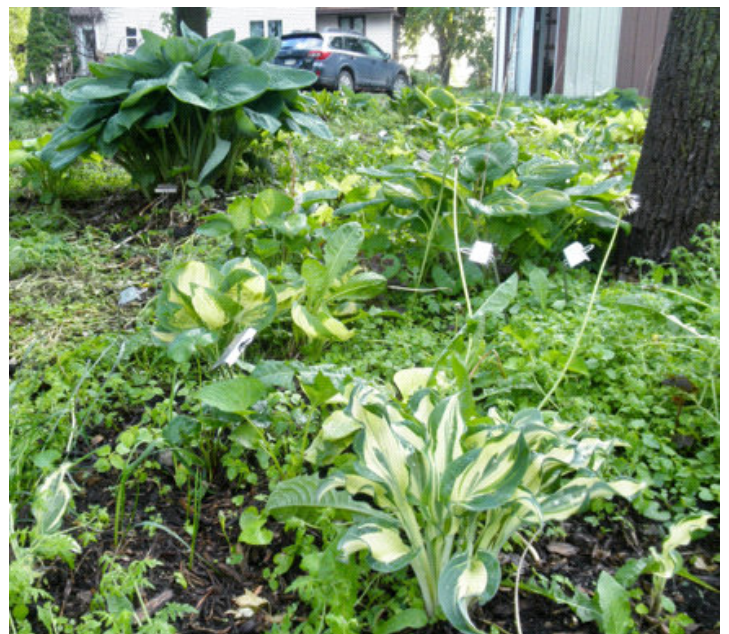


A vibrant bed of hostas is designed to grab the eye by combining hostas of different sizes, shapes and colors. The addition of other perennials increases the interest and adds seasonal color.

As stock is sold and space opens up, the ground is reconditioned and prepared for new divisions of hostas to be planted for future sales. This area is off to the side yard, away from the wooden walkway.



Right, a bed of hostas including *Hosta* 'Bullfrog', 'Popcorn' and 'Blue Dolphin'.



Hostas listed for sale remain planted in rows in the ground until an order is placed. Inventory is updated daily, as orders are received and as divisions are deemed ready to be sold.



Hostas recently planted for growth before being sold including *H.* 'Bloodline' in the bottom rows and *H.* 'Teacher's Pet' in the top row.



Another display bed of hostas including *H.* 'Sugar and Spice', 'Kirk's Gold', a sport of 'Pewter Goblet', 'Bigga Luigi' and 'Oil Paint'.



Many hosta varieties are planted in the ground for root growth before being listed for sale. Each will be dug and washed immediately before wrapping them for shipping



Right, *H.* 'Sew in Love'.



H. 'Zippity Zee Zaw' in spring.



H. 'Zippity Zee Zaw' in summer.



Right, *H.* 'Send Your Camel to Bed' in spring.

Below, *H.* 'Send Your Camel to Bed' in summer.



A display bed of hostas including *H.* 'Battle Star', 'Giantland Butterfly Wings', 'Moon Split', 'Marbled Cream' and a seedling from 'Vivacious'.



H. 'Tiki Dance' in spring.

H. 'Tiki Dance' in summer.



H. 'Spring Sunrise'



H. 'Cherry Tart Surprise'



H. 'Blueberry Parfait' streaked sport.



H. 'Radiant Beauty'



H. 'Smoochy'



H. 'Glittering Goldie'



H. 'Fairy Garden Deluxe'



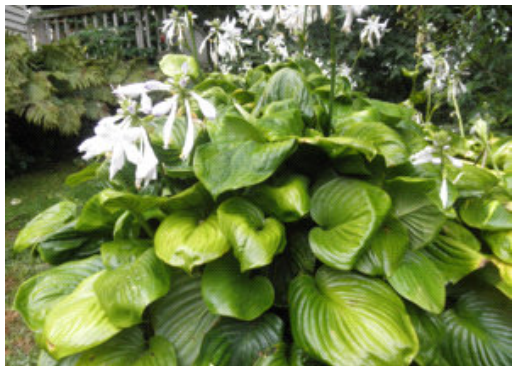
H. 'Jolly Martian'



H. 'Banana Skins'



H. 'Orange Twist'



H. 'Green Blimp'



H. 'World of Color' in early spring.



H. 'World of Color' in late spring.



H. 'World of Color' in summer.



H. 'Show Girl'



H. 'Luminous Flare of Colors'



H. 'Georgia Satellite'



H. 'Light Bright' in spring.



H. 'Light Bright' in summer.



H. 'Frozen'



H. 'Wind in the Willows' in spring.



H. 'Wind in the Willows' in summer.



H. 'Georgia Satellite'



H. 'Little Noah', named for Mike's grandson.



H. 'Jumping Jacks' in spring.



H. 'Tablespoon'



H. 'Ice Prince'



H. 'Blue Bubbles' in spring.



H. 'Monopoly' sport



H. 'Green Ghost' in early spring.



H. 'Green Ghost' in late spring .
Eventually, it will turn fully green.



H. 'Midnight Blue'



Enormous flowers that adorn *H.*
'Green Blimp'.



H. 'Derecho'



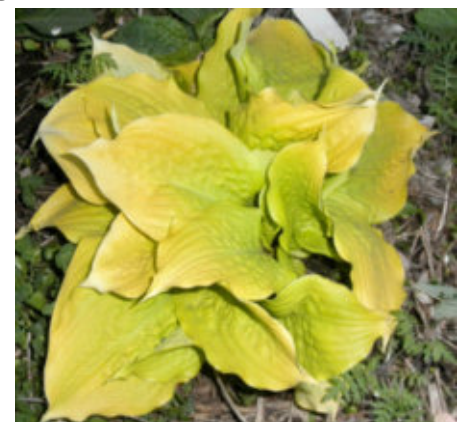
H. 'Little Luke', named for Mike's
grandson.



H. 'Beautiful Night'



H. 'Flare of Color'



H. 'Dance Party'



H. 'Fruit Salad' in spring.



H. 'Fruit Salad' in summer.



H. 'Eggs Over Easy'



H. 'Father's Day'



H. 'Exit, Stage Left'



H. 'Bullfrog'

Mike offers many varieties for sale that have failed in tissue culture, which leaves natural division as the only method of propagation. This gives those varieties the designation of rare or hard to find. A few are shown here.



The unique leaf of H. 'Embroidery'.



H. 'Starship Enterprise' leaf.



Left, H. 'Starship Enterprise' is a sport of H. 'Captain Kirk' originated by Charles Kwick. The coloration and pattern is similar to H. 'Captain's Adventure' on the right. Both are offered for sale on the website.



