

Back to Basics:

“Sometimes it is time to get back to the basics, to tell the old stories again so we can all try to share in the same view of the hosta world.” Bob Solberg

Hostas have lily-like flowers but are members

of the agave family. For years hostas were considered in the lily family based on the structure of their flowers. With the advent of DNA testing hostas because of their uniqueness have either been put in their own family, the *Hostaceae*, or lumped into the asparagus family, the *Asparagaceae*, in the agave subfamily *Agavoideae*. Hostas and agaves have the same chromosome numbers. Think of them as similar plants, one adapted to moist forests and meadows and the other adapted to dryer conditions.

Hostas are perennial annuals. Hostas have an annual life cycle. They emerge in the spring, make new leaves and roots, produce flowers and seeds, and then go dormant for the winter. They have a seed-based biology, tall flowering scapes, easy for bee pollinators to find, that scatter seeds away from the mother plant. They have perennial crown tissue that stores energy over the winter and forms dormant buds to repeat the process year after year. In the care of a good gardener, hostas are immortal.

Hostas are shade plants. Some say hostas tolerate shade, but I think they prefer some shade. They would like more sun, however, than most of us give them. They appreciate light but their leaves will burn in the direct sunlight of a hot summer. Morning sun is usually a great placement for hostas or areas of the garden with bright indirect lighting.

Hostas are drought tolerant. Yes, amazingly hostas will survive the most extreme drought but not without some damage to the crown resulting in smaller plants the following year. Hostas will dry rot in hot, dry summers and sometimes emerge as little tissue culture like plants in the spring. In fact, hostas love water. I do not know if you can water them too much. In fact, you can grow them in a shallow stream or in a pot in a pond. In very rainy summers, their foliage might develop fungal infections but the next spring their spot free leaves will emerge bigger and better than ever.

Hostas are native plants. Hostas are native plants in Japan, China, Korea, and Russia. *H. ventricosa* has even become naturalized in some parts of the United States. There are between 20 and 40 species of hostas in the wild depending on whether you are a lumpers or a splitter, but

many are rarely used to produce new hosta cultivars. Here are the hosta species that really matter to horticulture and hosta collectors. *H. montana*, *H. sieboldiana*, *H. fluctuans*, and *H. nigrescens* are the parents to most large hosta hybrids. *H. sieboldiana* is the origin of almost all blue hostas. *H. plantaginea* is the origin of all fragrant-flowered hostas. *H. sieboldii* is the beginning point for hosta variegation, although many new variegated hostas have *H. sieboldiana* (‘Dorothy Benedict’) as a parent. Purple pigments in the leaf petioles and scapes of hostas can be found in the Japanese species of *H. longipes*, *H. kikutii*, *H. hyopleuca*, and *H. pycnophylla*. Red pigments, especially the ones I have isolated in the leaves of hostas, primarily come from the Korean species *H. yingeri*, *H. tsushimensis*, and *H. clausa* as well as the Japanese species, *H. sieboldii*. Small and miniature hostas are hybridized generally from *H. venusta*, *H. nakaiana*, *H. longissima*, *H. gracillima* and *H. sieboldii*. While useful in hybridizing, *H. ventricosa* and *H. lancifolia* are traditional landscape plants useful in mass plantings, borders, and ringing trees.

Hostas are huge. Giant hostas are spectacular. There is nothing quite like seeing a garden of seven-foot-wide hostas, taller than your belly button. They are like skyscrapers, amazing structures that we cannot quite fathom how they came to be. We really do not know how, where, or when that tiny seedling that became ‘Sum and Substance’ first appeared on earth but it exceeded all our expectations. Now it’s the bigger the better, and ‘Empress Wu’ has become the new hosta synonymous with huge. I am impressed every summer by the giants; every garden no matter how small should have a few.

Hostas are tiny. Miniature hostas are cute. Some minis are small because they come from small parents, but some are small because they do not grow well. I like the vigorous ones even if they have to be divided every once in a while, to keep them in their designated space. ‘Tears of Joy’ is an upright twisted tiny leafed hosta from *H. venusta* parentage. The leaf twisting is caused by some strange mutation that has also reduced the flower petals so that the flowers appear tiny and yellow, with just the pollen on the anthers visible. Hostas of extreme sizes, large or small, are equally amazing.

Hostas are low maintenance, carefree plants. True, plant a hosta and walk away from it and it will survive on its own. If you want to maximize your hosta’s potential and your enjoyment of their company, then a little fertilizer in the spring, irrigation in dry times, and maybe a little weeding and mulching will make a big difference. Half of the fun of gardening is helping your hostas prosper.

Hostas do need to be fertilized. Many hosta gardeners tell me that they never feed their hostas. Maybe they all have deep rich soils but hostas like all plants need specific nutrients in ample supply to make their own food. For hostas, nitrogen and magnesium are the most important for producing large, high quality leaves. Try a foliar feed of liquid fertilizer in the spring a couple of times and see if your hostas don't look happier.

Hostas are virtually pest and disease free.

Hostas can be, and I do not mean in a virtual internet kind of way. If you are careful how you obtain your new hostas you can probably avoid foliar nematodes and Hosta Virus X, the two pest problems that get all the research money and bad press. That leaves slugs, sticks, and fungus, all temporary flaws on hosta leaves that will not reappear the next spring. I think it is unreasonable to want your hosta leaves to remain unblemished all summer; after all they do live in the real world.

Hostas are “deer candy.” The number one threat to Hostadom is deer. They have had an enormous effect on the growth of the popularity of hostas in the past decade. Serious hosta growers in areas when deer are too numerous need to get a fence or use repellent regularly to prevent those varmints from turning your beautiful hosta clumps into celery stalks. Hostas are evidently very nutritious to other mammals as well; voles and even the occasional crazed squirrel will eat hostas. Keep up the good fight!

Hostas with blue leaves are shade lovers. Since almost all blue hostas can be traced back to *H. sieboldiana*, a hosta that prefers a cooler spot in the garden, blue hostas are very reliable in shade. Some hybrids, like ‘Halcyon’ can, however, grow well in a good deal of sun but with some leaf damage if temperatures are extremely high.

Hostas with yellow leaves are not sun lovers. Yellow hostas, because they have less chlorophyll than green hostas, need more light to produce their food. Thus, it would make sense that they would prosper in more sun. Unfortunately, many gold hostas are children of *H. sieboldiana*, the shade lover, and cannot handle hot sun. Many gold hostas are also from *H. sieboldii* and *H. tsu-shimensis* and some of these are more sun tolerant, especially in the North.

Hostas with fragrant flowers demand sun

and water. All fragrant-flowered hostas can be traced back to *H. plantaginea* as a parent. *H. plantaginea* grows best in a sunnier location (but not the full sun of the Walmart parking lot), with lots of water. I grow my fra-

grant-flowered hostas on a deck that gets mid-day sun in pots sitting in saucers of water.

Hostas grow best in rich, well drained, moist soil. Not all of our gardens have “rich, well-drained, evenly moist soil” no matter how much soil amending we do. If not, the solution may be to grow your hostas in pots! In a container, the gardener can control the soil, light, water, and nutrition for its hostas. From Zone 7, maybe Zone 6, south, there is no winter protection needed for potted hostas, just maybe for your expensive ceramic pots.

Hostas make great cut flowers. Scapes of hosta flowers are great in flower arrangements. Cut the scape after a couple of flowers have opened, place in water, re-cutting the scape every few days, and the flowers will last for up to two weeks. Does cutting your hosta scapes induce more hosta leaves? No, the growing point of the shoot that made the leaves is now on the top of the scape making flowers. Allowing seed set however might take some energy from next year's plant so cut the scapes after they begin setting seeds, after several flowers have opened, or when the scapes become unruly, grabbing at garden visitors.

Hostas can be propagated by division. We all know that hosta clumps can be divided in half, in quarters, or even down to single divisions using a sharp Ginsu knife. I like to do this in August after the hottest weather has past so that the divisions can regrow new roots before dormancy. Others prefer to divide their hostas in early spring as they emerge but usually only in half or maybe quarters, if it a large clump. The tissue culture process is just dividing hostas in test tubes in the presence of growth regulating hormones. In TC, hostas can be divided every 4-6 weeks instead of 2-3 years in the garden. It is because of tissue culture that hostas are so affordable. Think how long it would take you to amass 100 divisions of your favorite hosta seedling by garden divisions. I bet you would have to charge a lot for them.

Hosta tetraploids are improved hostas. Hostas that are chemically converted from their normal two sets of chromosomes to double that number (4 sets) have their advantages and disadvantages. Converted tetraploids have shorter scapes, larger flowers, thicker leaves on more compact plants, and maybe richer colors. Unfortunately, they are smaller plants generally, except for white-centered forms, have shorter roots and grow more slowly. There is some good and some not so good. Someday, because of their greater genetic variability tetraploid hybrids may produce great advances in hosta hybridizing but it looks to be a slow process.

Hostas grow best north of I-80. I think they do. The combination of cooler summers with lower light intensity, longer days, and a shorter growing season allows hostas to be grown in more sun without heat stress. The more tropical *H. plantaginea* and its children, however, may actually grow better in the South if given ample water and light.

Hostas will grow in Florida. Not all hostas need a cold dormancy to flourish. Many hostas will grow well in the panhandle of northern Florida but 'So Sweet' is almost evergreen in Orlando and further south. Hostas can be grown in Los Angeles also, but all do better in pots than in the ground.

Hostas grow larger year after year. All hostas have a maximum size based on their genetic composition but hosta clumps do tend to increase in the number of shoots year after year. After maybe a decade some hostas will only produce shoots from the edge of the crown, leaving a "fairy ring". Some older hosta clumps start to wander around the garden, opening up, looking more like a forest than a tree. I do think there are limits to growth, but they are dependent on changes in the garden environment and the enthusiasm of the gardener.

Hostas have interesting names. All horticultural plants have "fancy" names given by their originators. There are over 8,000 hostas with names that we have recorded and really many more in hybridizer's gardens across Hostadom. I do not know if any other plant has such interesting and entertaining names, so much so that many hostas are purchased for the name alone. There are song names, food names, names of friends, and somewhat risqué names. Great names make for great hostas. Just look at the "mouse mania" that the name 'Blue Mouse Ears' has generated.

Hostas have interesting flowers. Hostas are not grown for their flowers, but some should be. There are of course fragrant flowers that fill our August evenings in the garden with delight. There are a few double flowers, too, more curiosities for me than anything else. Now hostas are beginning to have flowers with different colored stripes, dark purple, red, and black. Yellow and blue flowers have been reported too. Soon you may be buying hostas for their unusual flowers as well as the pretty foliage, believe it or not.

Hosta hybridizing is fun and easy. It can be, but it can be difficult and frustrating, too. Hosta seeds are easy to germinate and grow into nice little plants. Some hostas set seed easily, but usually the ones you really want to set are obstinate. If you want to give hosta hybridizing a try, cross a blue hosta with a yellow hosta. The result will be

green, blue and yellow seedlings. Streaked hostas make good pod parents, yielding variegated prodigy. You can even sow the seeds in the garden in the fall and they will jump out of the ground in the spring. Give it a try, it really is fun.

Hostas are red, too. The quest is on for red hostas. We now have hostas with completely red or purple petioles and scapes. There are hostas with purple up the midrib into the middle of the leaf and even a little red on the leaf margin. The ultimate goal is to have hostas with red leaves that stay red. They are coming, I can't wait.

Hosta collecting is addicting. If you are reading this little newspaper, then you are either enjoying the hosta high, trying to collect in moderation, or have quit this week for the umpteenth time. Hosta collecting creates a positive feeling in a world of negativity. It is a good thing. Just stay positive and don't spend all the grocery money.

Hostas come with friends. Hostas have been correctly called the "Friendship Plant." Some of the best friends that I have found their way to me because of our mutual interest in hostas. Some I have pursued, and some have chosen me, but with all, our relationship goes much farther than just the plant. It may be because we met under the therapeutic effect of hostas in a shady garden.

Hostas are our friends. I believe there is a spiritual relationship between hostas and humans. We really do love them in some magical way. We share our lives with them, the joys of spring, the stress of summer, the sadness of autumn, and the hope-filled dreams of winter. They are friends that give back more than they take. They make us feel good about ourselves.

Hostas emerge magically in the spring. No one can argue that this is the number one reason we grow hostas. For three or four weeks in the spring, hostas entrance us. We get caught up in the spirit of spring renewal, freshness and purity, resurrection. Hostas more than any plant I know relish in this explosion of rebirth. Picture a seven-foot clump of 'Sum and Substance' expanding rapidly enough to make a full clump from bare soil in 2-3 weeks. You can almost watch it grow. And when those huge leaves begin to unfurl, goose bumps will run up and down your spine. In spring we all do the hosta dance, running to the garden two, three or more times a day, looking for new shoots. We count the eyes and calculate the profit. We help the minis emerge by removing a leaf or that extra mulch we gave them as a blanket for winter. We suffer when a twig pokes a hole in a perfect leaf. We wander out into the garden and are lost for hours, transported to hosta heaven. Maybe we wish that we could be like hostas and have a

fresh start every year. On New Year's Eve we like to think we have that magical power reserved for immortals, but by February we realize that we all carry the past into the future. Then comes March and April and we do the hosta dance and it is another year of hope in the garden. Last summer seems years away. This is why we grow hostas, first to share their joy and their confidence in the future and second to share it with each other.

Hostas are supposed to be fun!!! We live in a critical world. We see the glass half empty more than half full. We see the slug holes in our hostas and not the perfect leaves. We abandon old favorites for the newest hosta sport that appears online. We are uncomfortable in a world that moves too fast. All time slows down in the shade garden when we look and listen to what the hostas have to say. Life, yes, is filled with disappointments but hope springs eternal. Happiness is really contentment, accepting our circumstances. The hostas know this better than we do as they sit patiently and peacefully in the shade. Hostas are supposed to be fun, hosta folks, too.

By Bob Solberg; this article is courtesy of Bob Solberg from Green Hill Gossip and the Central Illinois Hosta Society newsletter "Great Expectations", September 2019

As part of this year's convention we have added a philanthropic element. We request you bring used eyeglasses for donation to LIONS INTERNATIONAL.

Convention Summary

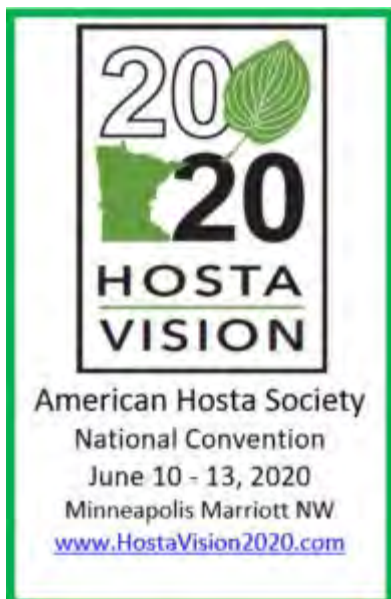


June 11, 12 and 13th, 2020 formal convention dates:

- o Seven Meals Include(Breakfast (F/Sat), Lunch (Th/Fr/Sat) & Dinner (Th/Sat))
- o Six Educational speakers (Thursday and Saturday afternoons, 3 each day)
- o Garden Tours (Fri & Sat morning) – Op-in to ride a bus or drive on your own
- o Hosta Show (Wed/Thursday entries, Judging Thursday, Open Show Thursday-Saturday)
- o Judges Clinics – Clinic 1: Wed. 1-5 pm, Clinic 2: Th. 9-11 am, Clinic 3: Fri. 7-8 pm
- o Hospitality (Wed/Th/Fri/Sat) – evening start time varies, ends daily at 11pm
- o AHS Auction (Friday) – 1:30 – 5:30 pm
- o Vending (Th/Fr/Sat) – times vary

June 10 add on optional tour to SE MN/ Rochester. Limited to 100. Cost \$50/person and includes a breakfast and box lunch. Bus leaves hotel at 7 am **SHARP** and anticipated to return about 5:30 pm. Tour includes a minimum of 5 lovely gardens. Shades of Green Hosta Society hosting.

Greetings and Welcome to the "Hosta Vision 2020" website where details pertaining to the American Hosta Society National Convention in June 2020 are provided for your perusal and convenience. The website will evolve as we approach the convention date with refined event details and schedules.



Your host for the AHS 2020 convention is the Minnesota Hosta Society. We are proud to once again host the convention. Our membership is excited to have you join us in fellowship and education as well as share our passion for gardening with *Hosta*. Our theme "Hosta Vision 2020" reflects the ever ex-

panding use of Hosta in the garden as one of the top perennials of choice due to their versatility in use and form in the landscape. Plus they are very hardy in Minnesota's Zone 4 climate!

Invite Other Plant Lovers to Join the Club
North Coast Hosta Society

Check out our Website (northcoasthostasociety.weebly.com)
and Facebook page (North Coast Hosta Society).

Check out the American Hosta Society: [WWW.Hosta Registrar.org](http://WWW.HostaRegistrar.org) for the Hosta Finder

In deference to football season, pictured are *H. '1st and Ten'* and *H. 'Brutus'*. These were registered by Dr. Doug and Mardy Beilstein and honor The Ohio State University.



FIRST CLASS



8241 Starburst Rd.
Mentor, OH 44060

Officers:

President: Barb Rauckhorst

phone: 440-237-6709

Vice President: Mike Kovach

email: majk2@cox.net

Phone: 216-642-7895

Treasurer: Jim Spuhler

email: jlsjls@att.net

phone: 440-846-2634

Secretary: Bonnie Erickson

email: bcerickson@att.net

phone: 440-835-0726

Newsletter Editor: Cindy Hughes

email: hughce3537@sbcglobal.net