



Volume 20, Issue 8

October, 2019



**President
Diana Plahn**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear Hosta Lovers;

Thanks to all of you who came to the last meeting. Our speaker was Bob Solberg, a nationally known hosta speaker who spoke on more than one topic. The presentation was on how to get more members for the local hosta society and the future of hostas. He also brought plants to sell which made those of us there very happy.

Our next meeting will be on October 20th at 1pm. We will have Joshua Spece as a speaker. He is well-known to those of us who go to the regional or national Hosta conventions as a vendor and speaker. His presentation will be on 'The Big World of Little Hostas'. This should be a good presentation especially for those of us who have too many hostas (if there is such a thing). There's always a place for small or miniature hostas! In between large hostas, at the front of the border, in containers, and in crevices. So come and find out what he has to say.

I would like to thank the members of the St. Louis Hosta Society for the past four years. I have enjoyed working with you as your president. Thank you all for all the help you have given me in the past.

Diana



2019 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

October 20

NOTE DATE CHANGE

Meeting with Speaker Josh Spece

1:00 PM, Creve Coeur Government Center

November

Board Meeting

Time and location TBA

December 8

Holiday Party – Home of Janelle and Jim Criscione

2:00 – 5:00 PM

624 Locksley Place, Webster Groves, MO 63119



Josh with mother Sue and grandmother.

Photo from web-site:

www.inthecountrygardenandgifts.com

October 20, 1:00 PM

Creve Coeur Government Center

**Josh Spece presents
“Big World of Little Hostas”**

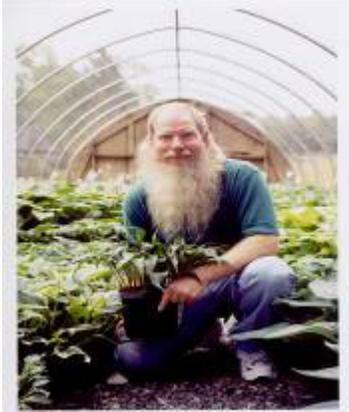
Josh owns and operates **In the Country Garden and Gifts**, a garden and gift shop located on his family’s dairy farm in Independence Iowa. Josh founded the business in 1998 with some artistic help from his mother, Sue Spece.

Although confined to a wheelchair, Josh has not let that inconvenience slow him down. He has an Associate of Applied Science degree in Horticulture and a love of unusual plants. His mother Sue has a creative eye and 30 years of experience making crafts. Together they have made **In the Country** a one-of-a-kind garden and gift shop. Although best known for specializing in hostas, **In the Country** also offers shade perennials, succulents, and dwarf conifers. In addition to hostas and their shady companions, Josh is also quite knowledgeable about water gardening.

Josh is a regular contributor of articles and photos to the American Hosta Society’s **The Hosta Journal** and serves as Web Editor-in-chief on the Board of Directors for the American Hosta Society. He has spoken to numerous garden groups about hostas, succulents, and water gardens.

On this visit to St. Louis, Josh will give us insight into the “Big World of Little Hostas”. Small and miniature hostas are extremely popular. They are cute and very practical for urban and suburban small gardens. Josh will give us tips on how to plant and care for them properly and discuss the many different miniature and small hostas currently available. He’ll also show us creative and fun ideas on how to display and arrange little hostas in the garden.

Join your fellow members on Sunday October 20 to welcome this inspiring young man to St. Louis.



Bob Solberg at Green Hill Farm

September meeting Bob Solberg

“The Future of Hostas”

At our September meeting nationally known hosta hybridizer and speaker Bob Solberg talked about the future of hostas as he sees it. The hosta world is changing and so must we.



H. 'First Blush' - Green Hill Farm

Bob's presentation focused on three areas - the fate of hosta societies, the changes in the hosta industry, and the evolution of the hosta itself.

Plant societies in general are aging and are experiencing declining attendance. The 'millennial' generation seems less engaged in the world around them, more self-centered and inward-looking. Bob sees hope of a turn-around. His experience finds that those in their early twenties are more back-to-nature. They want land, chickens and like growing things.

Bob feels that hosta clubs need leaders, workers, hosta collectors, hosta nurseries and recruiting. Hosta clubs offer local knowledge, speakers, plant sales, garden tours and regional meetings. How many of these things are available through Google?

We have just elected new officers who are excited about serving. They have ideas about future activities and are open to all suggestions. Don't be shy about talking with them and offering your views. Is there a topic about which you would like more information? Is there a speaker you are dying to hear? Our society is blessed with many workers. Rain or shine, hot or cold, members help at our MOBot work day, MOBot plant sale and vendor day. Someone always jumps in to help carry, arrange and clean-up.

Hosta collectors are important because of their vast local knowledge. Not every hosta grows well everywhere. St. Louis is a difficult place to grow hostas. We are not far enough North to enjoy the coolness that hostas prefer, but also not far enough South that we can put them in pots and leave them outside all winter. Collectors understand our local growing conditions, the composition of our soil, what plants just won't easily grow here. They have lots of experience planting, growing and dividing. Our society has many such people who are more than happy to pass on their expertise.

Hosta societies do better when they can form alliances with near-by nurseries and do not have to rely on big-box store inventory or catalog sales. It is certainly more satisfying to feel those hosta leaves instead of just viewing them online. We do not have nurseries with huge selections close-by. However, the emergence of **Hostas on the Bluff** in Fairview Heights might change that. We are fortunate to have two nurseries, **Homestead Farms** and **Avalon Acres** within driving distance. They are long-time participants in our Vendor Day.

Our plant sales and auction attract new members. I met several non-members at the garden walk held in our yard in May. We have a Facebook page; maybe Instagram is next. These are all good recruitment tools.

The future of our society looks bright. We possess all the ingredients necessary. Let's build on what we have.

Bob Solberg – the future of the hosta industry

In the beginning hostas were grown in the ground. Hostas produced for the retail trade were divisions of parent plants. There were few choices with limited stock and they were very expensive. Bob noted that it takes close to eight years for new varieties to reach the market. Then tissue culture as a means of propagation was developed. Tissue culture labs flourished and the number of new introductions increased dramatically. The quantity of plants available decreased the price. Hostas sport in a test tube in the same way they do in the ground only much faster. Thus the number of new introductions also increased rapidly.

A few years ago the hosta industry was rocked by the closure of two large tissue culture labs. Laboratories failed in the cut-throat business world, found they could not compete with stiff overseas competition, or chose to move their product lines away from hostas to other popular and cheaper to produce plants. The number of businesses providing quality tissue cultured hostas has diminished and there is less choice on the wholesale market.

Five years ago, Bob thought that lots of small tissue labs would emerge replacing these giants. That hasn't happened. Instead people started dividing again, growing new, exciting and high priced seedlings. Small hybridizers are dividing their hostas and sharing them with their friends and other hybridizers much as was done in the beginning.

The arrival of 21st Century technology is changing the way hostas are sold. Small growers are separating their parent plants into divisions and then offering an eye or two on Facebook or eBay. Quantities are limited. Hosta prices have risen again to 20th Century levels. This is good for hybridizers who can introduce their own hostas and make a much larger return on their hybridizing work. It is not so good for consumers with limited budgets.

Bob Solberg – the future of the hosta itself

The goal of a good hybridizer is to create a plant that is distinctive. Hostas colors are green, gold, blue and white either solid or in various combinations. Flowers are white and various shades of purple. Bob has been pushing the envelope by introducing the color red. Many hostas have red petioles, but the coloring stops there. Bob has introduced *H.* 'First Blush' which has red in the leaves. Unfortunately in St. Louis the hosta does not retain that coloring all season. Perhaps the next generation of that cultivar will. Bob's *H.* 'Beet Salad' has petioles that are deep burgundy, almost black, while *H.* 'Lemon Snap' deep red petioles that dramatically contrast with its bright yellow leaves.

Bob and other hybridizers are working toward red flowers. Jeff Moore has developed such plants. From Japan comes *H.* 'Miracle Lemony' with pale yellow flowers. While the flowers are unique, the plants themselves leave much to be desired. The future will be exciting colors on exciting plants that grow well in all parts of the country.

Another trend is the creation of hostas with different ploidy levels (more than two sets of chromosomes). Triploid (three sets of chromosomes) and tetraploid (four sets) hostas have thicker substance in both leaves and flowers and more intense foliage colors. Others are producing polyploid chimeras where the different cell layers in a hosta leaf have different ploidy levels. *H.* 'Stitch in Time' is an example.

We are only limited by our imagination.



H. 'Beet Salad'

Photo from www.nhhostas.com



H. 'Lemon Snap'

Photo www.nhhostas.com



H. 'Stitch in Time'

Photo www.plantsdelight.com

Hosta cultivation – Japanese Style

Bob Solberg recently returned from a trip to Japan. He had the opportunity to accompany fellow hybridizer Mark Zilis in his hunt for native Japanese hostas. It was an enlightening trip.

His first surprise was that hostas in the wild grow mostly on rocks. They grow on the sides of rocky mountain cliffs, on highway retaining walls, on rocky creek beds. Spot a crevice having a bit of moss and a tuft of grass growing on it and one is apt to find a hosta nestled there.

Many hosta species are native to Japan. Collectors go out in the field and look for special forms (sports) of the natives. Different species grow in different areas – you have to know where to look.

Gardening space is limited so collectors prefer smaller varieties. They keep their plants small and grow them in pots like bonsai. Usually there are only one or two eyes in each container.

Like here, there are hosta shows where the collectors are able to show off their plants as well as educate the general public. The Japanese are concerned not only with the leaves but also the plant's form, color and flowers. It's about the balance of the whole plant. The container in which the plant is displayed and even the soil is important. Everything must be in harmony. Think bonsai.

Thanks to Bob Solberg for a most interesting and entertaining afternoon.



Hostas growing on cliff side

Photo from www.indefenseofplants.com



Hosta Ki Nakafu Otome

Photo from www.artofbonsai.org

New Officers for 2020-2021

At the September meeting a slate of officers was presented to the membership by Mike Schmitt of the nominating committee. The slate was unanimously accepted. Your new officers are:

President - Phyllis Weidman: Most of you know Phyllis. She has been quite active in our Society since the early 2000s. She served as president from 2012 – 2015. Each year she coordinates the MOBot Work Day and has been chairman of the MOBot Hosta Sale. She loves people almost as much as she loves hostas.

Vice-president - Josh Jagger: Josh is relatively new to our Society. We got to know him when he opened his garden for a 2018 Garden Walk. His blueberry lemonade is legendary. His garden is up-and-coming and rapidly expanding. It will be nice to have a younger voice on the Board.

Treasurer - Dave Poos: Dave has been active with the Society since the early 2000s when Arlie Tempel, then president, persuaded him to attend Board meetings. Dave previously served as Treasurer from 2008 – 2011 and Vice-president from 2012 – 2015.

Secretary - Jolly Ann Whitener: Jolly Ann has consented to remain as Secretary for another term. When not on the road with her husband in their RV, Jolly Ann is present at all Society meetings and events. Jolly Ann has chaired a number of committees, most recently our Vendor Day event. Besides being Secretary, Jolly Ann has been in charge of those indispensable name tags.

How late is too late to plant hostas in the fall?

(Excerpt taken from an article written by Bob Solberg)

My standard rule is you want to get them in the ground 4-6 weeks before the first frost. This allows them to make some new roots while the soil is still warm and then have some time to prepare for winter.

Most of us, though, have planted hostas in the ground later than that with good success. I have planted them as late as the first week of November (in North Carolina) without any noticeable ill effects. You do run a risk with late planting however. Hostas are completely dormant during the winter, and they will not produce new roots until after they have made new foliage in the spring. They literally sleep through the winter.

Late planted hostas may rot over the winter if 1) the ground is frozen and stays frozen shortly after they are planted, 2) they are very dry when the ground freezes, 3) the soil stays too wet because of poor winter drainage or 4) heaving occurs during cycles of the soil freezing and thawing. Snow cover or a covering of mulch will help with all these situations. Remember, blue hostas, as well as many gold hostas, with *H. sieboldiana* and *H. 'Tokudama'* parents as well as some *H. longipes* types are the most susceptible to winter kill. Miniature hostas may also completely heave out of the ground, resulting in cold damage to the crown.

So, with late hosta planting, first make sure the plants are full of water when the first hard frost hits. Then try a little mulch to protect the hosta crowns and moderate soil temperatures. (Beware! Deep mulches may entice mice and voles to make their winter homes in your hosta garden.) With a little luck from the winter weather you can probably extend your planting season another month or so, even after the first frost.

St. Louis Hosta Society Officials

Diana Plahn – President
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dplahn@me.com

Jolly Ann Whitener – Secretary
jawhit6@gmail.com

Karen Frey – Hospitality

Martha LaFata – Vice-President
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Melissa Byrd – Treasurer
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Joan Poos – Newsletter Editor
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St. Louis Hosta Society Membership Information

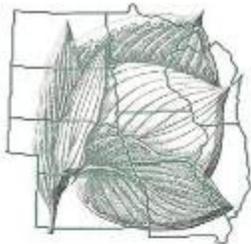
Contact: Melissa Byrd
117 Gunston Hall Drive
St. Charles, MO 63304
mabyrd68@gmail.com

Dues: \$7 per year, \$18 for three years
Family or Individual

Meetings held at the **Creve Coeur Government Center, 300 N. New Ballas, 63141** (between Ladue Road and Olive), unless otherwise noted.

Visit our Web site: www.stlouishosta.org

Visit us on Facebook, St. Louis Hosta Society



Midwest Regional Hosta Society

The Midwest Regional Hosta Society represents Region 5 of the American Hosta Society that includes 9 states.

Membership in the society is \$20.00 for 2 years, which includes two issues per year of the newsletter.

Please mail a check made payable to **MRHS** to:

Barbara Schroeder,
Treasurer
1819 Coventry Dr.
Champaign, IL 61822

along with Name, Address, phone, and email (Most correspondence is by email). For questions email MRHS.Hosta@gmail.com.



AMERICAN HOSTA SOCIETY

Members receive three issues per year of the Hosta Journal, which includes color photographs of hostas, reports on national conventions, scientific information concerning current research pertaining to hostas, and advertisements of interest to hosta families.

Membership checks should be made out to "AHS," and mailed to:

Sandie Markland, AHS Membership Secretary
P O Box 7539
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948

Dues for one year are \$30 for an individual and \$34 for a family. For more information, visit the AHS website: <http://www.americanhostasociety.org/>