

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

central illinois hosta society  
[www.cihshostaclub.org](http://www.cihshostaclub.org)

september 2009  
volume 15, issue 7

## president's letter

A special thank you to Kathy Allen for arranging the hosta leaf competition at the August meeting at Luthy Botanical Garden. We had lots of leaves entered, and even a fake, plastic, hosta leaf that fooled Bob Streitmatter, one of the judges! Below is a picture of the winner of the biggest leaf and a photo of the smallest leaf. This is just one of many neat aspects about hosta that I like: the incredible diversity and variation. The biggest leaf winner, *H. 'Sum of All,'* is HUGE while the smallest is the size of my pinkie nail!



**2009 was the year for hostas.** The member gardens we visited this summer have been gorgeous. Hostas have been bigger than ever. Our garden was lush! This summer Bob and I visited Tuscany. We did manage to see a few gardens; including the one of the world's oldest botanical gardens in Florence. Hostas were not prevalent, but we did spot a few here and there. The tall, thin, Italian Cypress that dotted the Tuscan countryside were beautiful. The immense grandeur of some of the gardens was incredible, with the sprawling lawns, ornate fountains and lengthy pergolas of blooming purple wisteria. We loved the colorful geraniums utilized in the window boxes. I would bet you will see geraniums featured in our containers next year...a gardener can always learn from his or her experiences.

I hope you will join me at our last CIHS event of 2009! Shirley Metz has organized a great evening for us on September 15<sup>th</sup>! Lastly, following my letter, on page 2, is a special note from Nancy Helmick and her family.

Warmly,  
Golda Ewalt, CIHS President

## annual banquet

**Tuesday, September 15<sup>th</sup>** (please note times below)

Speaker: Mark Zilis

Kickapoo Creek Winery/Connor Nursery  
6605 N. Smith Road, Edwards, Illinois

**5:45 pm** Beer/Wine, cash bar

**6:30 pm** Dinner

**7:30 pm** Program

This year's keynote speaker is Mark Zilis. Mark is owner and founder of Q&Z Nursery in Rochelle, Illinois. He is most noted for his tissue culture work with hosta and introducing over 200 new hosta; some of which are: 'Frosted Mouse Ears', 'Holy Mouse Ears', 'Pineapple Upside-down Cake', 'Victory', 'Sweet Home Chicago' and 'Summer Breeze'. He is a recipient of the American Hosta Society's Alex J. Summers Distinguished Merit Award,

In addition, Mark is a noted author. His work includes *The Hosta Handbook* and his latest, *The Hostapedia*. He will have copies of his new book available for sale. This is a huge book, a hosta encyclopedia, which is the most definitive work on hosta, in print and a must for every collector and gardener. It's on everyone's wish list.

The Banquet cost is \$35 for CIHS members and \$40 for non-members. The cost includes a dinner buffet, the program and a very special gift hosta from Mark's breeding program. Dinner will be served at 6:30, with a cash bar available at 5:45. After a brief meeting, the program will begin at 7:30. Please make checks payable to CIHS. Contact Shirley Metz for more information at 309.263.7103 or [jametz@comcast.net](mailto:jametz@comcast.net) **Note:** University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners will receive continuing education credit for attending the Zilis program.

**Directions:** From Peoria, take I-74 west to exit 82 (Kickapoo/Edwards). Turn left onto Kickapoo-Edwards Road. Travel ¼ mile and turn right onto Smith Road (note winery sign). The entrance to the winery is just past the curve and on the right; watch for the windmill.

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## Dear CIHS Members

Our family would like to express our sincere thank you for remembering Walt in such a special way. The hosta bench and stone are both so beautiful. I am sure Walt would be very surprised by this honor as well as quite humbled. The setting is so peaceful in the hosta glade and the bench should be enjoyed by many.

The dedication is something none in our family will forget. It was touching to hear the personal words about Walt and we especially want to thank Chuck Crider for the things he said in his tribute to Walt. It helps to know that for the last twenty-five years Walt was doing exactly what he loved to do and all of you were a huge part of that.

Thank you all for the special memorial and dedication and for your friendship with Walt and me.

Nancy Helmick and Family

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## welcome new members!!!

Betty Kaebel  
Joyce Love  
Rebecca Kelly  
Ralph & Karen Hofstetter.

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## hosta question & answer

### **How do you care for hostas in the fall?**

Fall is when seedpods are formed and the plants start adding roots for next year. Hostas should receive 2 inches of water per week in the fall. That is what hostas receive in their native Japan. However, hostas rhizomes don't like standing water so provide good drainage. Lightly fertilize your plants in the fall as you are watering them. Cut off the leaves as soon as there is a sign they are receding. Getting rid of the dead foliage will reduce the possibility of pests or insect eggs wintering in the decaying leaves. Put the foliage in the garbage, not the compost pile, to get rid of pest eggs. (NOTE: If there are signs of nematodes, cut the leaves as soon there are signs, even in July or August). Put out slug bait in fall and in late winter to clean up slugs and snails.

### **What is the best soil mixture for planting hostas?**

George Schmid mixes 1 bag Nature's Help, 1 bag cheap top soil, 1 bag composted cow manure, 1 bag of peat humus or compost, and a handful of lime. When establishing a bed, George uses 1/3 clay, 1/3 of the above mixture and 1/3 chicken grit or pine bark. He adds fertilizer after planting. Most hostas in the wild are in a pH of 5 or 6. Be careful about the amount of lime you give your azaleas if hostas are nearby. Get a soil test done to be sure of the pH.

**By Ann Bentsen from the Georgia Hosta Society Newsletter**

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## to join:

Central Illinois Hosta Society  
\$10/year, form on back cover

Midwest Reg. Hosta Society  
\$20/2 years  
Send dues to:  
Pete Postelwaite, Treasurer  
21172 Andover Road  
Kildeer, IL 60047

American Hosta Society  
\$30 individual, \$57/2 years  
\$34 family, \$62/2 years  
Send dues to:  
Sandie Markland  
AHS Membership Secretary  
Post Office Box 7539  
Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948



## did you know

- In the sentence, “I have lots of hostas in my garden,” the use of the word “hostas” is correct; using “hosta” would be incorrect. See Rules for the Rendition of Genus, Species and Cultivar Names, <http://www.americanhostasociety.org/pdf/rulesforhostanames20060604.pdf>
- The development of the tissue culture process for hostas first occurred in the late 1970s.
- The American Hosta Society was formed in 1968. See <http://www.americanhostasociety.org>
- Some morning sun can be beneficial to hostas, but strong afternoon sun should be avoided.
- If not provided with enough moisture on a regular basis throughout the growing season (equivalent of approx. 1 to 1 ½ inches of rain per week), some hostas may go heat dormant when temperatures reach approx. 95 F. Heat dormant hostas are more susceptible to damage, which may appear during the current as well as the following year.
- Even though good fall garden cleanup of old foliage may reduce the number of fungus spores in the garden, the susceptibility of certain hostas (ie: *H. 'tokudama'*) to infection may be genetically based.
- Foliar nematode damage appears between the veins of hosta leaves (never crosses) as dying and dead tissue, initially resulting in brown stripes progressively fading to just a slight discoloration. Eventually, the area will completely brown-out. Additional detail and pictures can be found at <http://www.americanhostasociety.org/nematodes.html>
- *Hosta ventricosa* is the only hosta that can produce seedlings genetically identical to the mother plant.

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## does anyone know?

In Mark Zilis's new Hostapedia, on page 709, *H. 'Peoria Knickers'* is listed as follows:

**History:** name listed, without originator or description, in *The Genus Hosta* (Schmid 1991, p. 201)

**Status:** have never seen in a collection or garden; not available for sale; probably no longer exists

Has anyone ever seen this hosta in collection or garden? Does anyone know anything about this cultivar? We could provide more detail for Mark...and more importantly better document our Peoria Hosta History. Please contact Ray Rodgers or Bob Streitmatter if you have any information.

## Mushroom Compost

Mushroom Compost; also known as Spent Mushroom Substrate (SMS), Spent Mushroom Compost (SMC) and Spent Mushroom Soil (SMS) is the growing medium that results from the commercial mushroom growing process. The main ingredients typically consist of horse manure and straw. Depending upon what is readily available and inexpensive, regionally blended formulas may include any number of additional ingredients, including hay, poultry manure, ground corn cobs, cottonseed hulls, cocoa shells, leaves, gypsum, etc.

The blended ingredients are composted for three to four weeks, ensuring that composting temperatures exceed 160°F for a few days. Then the mixture is steam-pasteurized at 140°F for 4-6 hours. When complete, the rich organic medium is loaded into dark buildings and mushroom spawn is sown. At least at some operations, a layer of sphagnum peat moss mixed with ground limestone is top-dressed onto the compost for the mushrooms to grow in.

Underground roots called mycelium grow in the medium, then five weeks after inoculation, mushrooms are ready to pick. Crops continue to be harvested for three to four weeks before the bed is considered exhausted. Mushroom compost is the composted organic material remaining. After mushrooms are harvested, the mushroom compost is again steam-treated (pasteurized) prior to removal to eliminate any pest, pathogens, weed seeds and mushroom remnants. The buildings are cleaned and sterilized and the process begins anew with the next batch of growing medium.

Unfortunately for gardeners, the pasteurization processes kill off all the wonderful micro-organisms that typically continue the composting process and are so important to gardens. Adding microbiology to the soil is one of the primary advantages of other organic composts, and that microbiology is vital for disease prevention and for supplying nutrients to plants. Although mushroom compost does not initially provide these benefits, it still provides a good substrate and food source for that biology. One can add some biology back in, or the compost can just be set out for nature to take its course. Worms love it! **Continued on page 4**

Probably the quickest way to activate mushroom compost is to make up a good batch of compost tea (from non-sterile compost) and mix it into the mushroom compost. One can also mix in some live compost, or mix the mushroom compost into a live compost pile to bring it back to life. This is basically doing the same thing that the compost tea would do, but the microbes just won't spread as quickly.

All of the gardeners that I have personally queried believe mushroom compost is very beneficial to their hosta gardens. In addition to increasing microbial activity, it acts as an excellent soil conditioner, improving the texture of heavy clay soils, adds humus to thin sandy soils, and increases water holding capacity.

Soluble salt levels (salinity) are reportedly higher in mushroom compost than in most other types of organic amendments. Fresh, undiluted mushroom compost is too concentrated for germinating seeds, young plants and salt-sensitive plants including rhododendrons, azaleas and blueberries. Mixing mushroom compost with garden soil (50/50) reduces the likelihood of problems with young plants. Another option is to use mushroom compost that has sat uncovered to "cure" over winter or longer, as much of the salts will have been leached out. But, the longer a pile of mushroom compost sits, the more weed seeds and pests will infiltrate the compost.

The appearance of fresh compost is similar to peat, with a light brown color and a light, fibrous texture. Weathered compost should resemble dark topsoil and have a loose, crumbly structure. Good quality mushroom compost should have an "earthy" aroma. Peculiar odors may be an indication that the product is not mature (not fully composted).

The pH of most mushroom compost is between 6.0 and 8.0 (hostas prefer pH between 5.5 and 7.5). Most soils are buffered against rapid and drastic changes in pH and even organic amendments with extremes in pH may not alter the overall soil pH a great deal.

Mushroom compost relatively quickly feeds the soil and, consequently, it does not last as long as fibrous organic mulches. Another negative, in my opinion, is it is one of the least attractive mulches. This is more of a negative in young gardens than gardens full of mature plants, which are better able to hide the mulch. In gardens where mulch will be very obvious, I suggest covering an inch of mushroom compost with an inch of more attractive shredded hardwood bark, or mixing the two together. This will also help with erosion control.

Fertility estimates vary by source. According to the American Mushroom Institute (AMI), mushroom compost contains an average of 1.12 percent nitrogen, 0.67 percent phosphate (phosphorous) and 1.24 percent potash (potassium), as well as other plant nutrients

such as calcium (2.29 percent) magnesium (0.35 percent) and iron (1.07 percent). The amount of carbon relative to nitrogen is an important indicator of nitrogen availability for plant growth. Ideal compost should have a ratio of 30:1 or lower. The AMI claims mushroom compost has an excellent 13:1 ratio.

Although the AMI claims mushroom farmers have used Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practices for decades and pesticides are rarely used on mushroom crops, several other sources claim mushroom growers do use pesticides. Mushroom compost may contain pesticide residues. Mushroom farmers may use chemicals to control flies and fungus gnats in their growing facilities. They may also use chemicals to treat for fungal infections.

Mushroom compost does not qualify for use on certified organic farms unless it too is certified.

From what I have heard and read, I believe resellers can acquire bulk loads of compost directly from mushroom farms at very attractive prices, leading me to believe there is a significant mark-up when sold to end-users. As demand goes up or down, so likely will the price. Basically the product will be sold at whatever the market will bare. Each gardener must decide for themselves whether the product is providing an acceptable cost/value relationship. I do use the product, but would use more if it were less expensive.

Even within a particular region, the price of bulk mushroom compost to end-users does vary, so making a few phone calls may result in a savings. If unable to pick up the compost, be sure to also compare delivery charges to your gardens and the number of cubic yards that can be delivered in one load.

In addition to nurseries, at least one independent trucking company in Central Illinois (Bernard Krumholtz Trucking, Eureka, Illinois) delivers mushroom compost. When I previously used them a few years ago, a tandem truck load (approx. 15 or 16 cu. yds.) was significantly less expensive per yard than local nurseries. But, when I recently inquired, the price was much closer. Another option this company presented to me was a semi-trailer (tractor-trailer) load. Krumholtz would pick up the load from the mushroom farm and deliver directly to my location, at a significant savings per yard. I didn't feel I could use and stockpile this amount, but for those that could, this seems to be an attractive option. Purchasing bagged compost typically is the most expensive option. According to one source, at least some bagged mushroom compost also includes a variety of other materials; similar to how most bagged cow manure is processed and marketed. **Continued on page 5**

Most businesses sell compost by the cubic yard, yet some quote by the ton. The cost of purchasing compost by weight is very weather sensitive. The wetter the pile, the more one pays!

Cubic Yard Needs Calculation (Length x Width x Depth (in feet) divided by 27 = amount of cubic yards needed). Step by step:

- Find area by multiplying length (in feet) by width (in feet)
- Multiply by desired depth in feet (1"=.08 feet, 1.5"=.13 feet, 2"=.17 feet, 2.5"=.21 feet, 3"=.25 feet)
- Divide final number by 27 to get how many cubic yards needed

Based on the following example, a 2" layer of mulch covering a 500 sq. ft. area will require approximately 3.5 cubic yards of mulch.

Garden size of 50' by 10' = 500 sq. ft.  
500 sq. ft. x .17 (2" depth) = 85 cu. ft.  
85 divided by 27 = 3.5 cu. yds.

**Primary information sources for this article and other related links of interest include:**

- American Mushroom Institute, <http://www.mushroomcompost.org/>
- American Mushroom Institute, <http://www.americamushroom.org/compost.htm>
- Dave's Cave, [http://squtch.quiet-like-a-panther.org/story/mushroom\\_compost-34](http://squtch.quiet-like-a-panther.org/story/mushroom_compost-34)
- Oregon State University, <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/news/story.php?SNo=28&storyType=garde>
- Penn State, Dept. of Horticulture, <http://consumerhorticulture.psu.edu/?q=node/38>
- Penn State, Mushroom Pest Problem Solver, <http://paipm.cas.psu.edu/365.htm>

By Ray Rodgers, CIHS

## Hope for the Future!

*Editor's Note: A great article that might add inspiration to your fall planting.* This article might be about what you wish you had done last year. Or maybe we start with the question, "Why did I choose to live where the winters are very long and extremely cold and now it's still winter and my garden has been brown, tan, black, and beige for three months??" It might end with a pitiful cry of "Woe is me!" but we're going to deal with that right now. It's early March, and regardless of the lion, the lamb, and the freezing inhospitable interminable winds, we want green, we

want colors, we want to know there's hope for the immediate future!! Well, yes, there is.

As I write this, it is February 27 in Champaign. My coppery-orange witch hazel, *Hamamelis x intermedia* 'Jelena', has been blooming for a week. This particular shrub is vase-shaped and vigorous (according to Michael Dirr's book-mine are still young and slow), could grow to 8'x10' without pruning, and received the Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit in 1993. Witch hazels' bloom time varies from January to March, and most of them have fabulous fall color too. The shape, ultimate size, vigor, and flower color vary (there are a great many cultivars) and some have wonderfully-scented flowers, too. They can add an ethereal winter presence in the front of your shrub border, especially if backed by evergreens; or you can use them as specimens in the garden as well. My next addition will be *H. x intermedia* 'Barmstedt Gold' if I can find it. Chris Lane, author of an inspirational book, *Witch Hazels*, says, "In my opinion, [Barmstedt Gold] is perhaps the finest cultivar of *H. x intermedia* to date." Tim Brotzman agrees that in North America, this is probably one of the very best witch hazels. I wish I'd planted it three years ago...

The day before yesterday, when the weather was stupendous (it's all relative, isn't it?), I was out cleaning parts of the garden. I cut back the nasty hellebore foliage from last year, brushed away the rotting leaves from my neighbor's diseased sycamore that I hate, and lo!! Fat green bud-stems are coming up! Here is an easy perennial, blooming in March, which likes part shade and dry-to-medium moisture conditions. In fact, the only *Helleborus* I've ever killed (and frequently, I might add) is *H. foetidus*; so, avoiding that one, I can vouch for the incredible fortitude of this genus, though mostly I grow *H. orientalis*, *x sternii*, and *x hybridus* cultivars. Although the flowers grow above the foliage, they usually nod downward, so plan on chucking them under the chin for full appreciation. (They're also good cut flowers, especially if you put them on the mantel and sit in a low chair...) Here you will find delight: colors range from a green-white to dark red, pink, true white, and true green; some are solid colored, some flushed in the center or edged with a different or brighter color, and some are speckled; some are even double-petaled. All these flowers last for over a month; actually, they last longer if you let them (like hydrangea flowers) and they sometimes seed around, though not rampantly. One teeny negative thing about hellebores is that they are very slow to mature and also that you can't be positive on flower color until they bloom, so I advise purchasing larger plants that are in bloom or you may be very old and very surprised and possibly disappointed when the flowers finally come.

**Continued on page 6**

Not far from the hellebores, I spotted bright green spears of daffodils (genus *Narcissus*).they're 3/4-inch high today! Ah daffodils, you know them well, and yet it seems there are more and more varieties every year: taller, shorter, large, tiny, all yellow, all white, yellow and white, white and orange, (etc., etc.) and those with truly luscious, fluffy, multi-teped centers. However, in spite of the fact that their foliage is already arising out of the slushy mush of freezing winter, they will not be blooming until early April and sometimes later.

But oh, those crocus! Many do indeed bloom in March. They inspire a close look and great thankfulness for their blooming bravery along still-frozen pathways. Just when we are truly positive (or is it negative?) that nothing in our gardens will ever come back, they send up flowers from among tiny grass-like leaves and bloom in yellow, purple, blue, white, mauve...

The blue *Scilla siberica* (Siberian squill) are also coming up under fall detritus, spreading down the incline around the pond. They self-seed with abandon, but the rare blue of their flowers makes it hard to do the deed of deadheading (yet I usually do).Their blooms will be ready towards the end of March or early April.

*Iris reticulata* is another March bloomer, and its leaves are also just starting to emerge. These have such beautiful flowers, blue to purple with yellow "beards" and grow low to the ground-another jewel to plant along a frequently-traveled path.

There are other March flowers that I don't happen to grow, though some are in the "been there, killed that" category: *Erica carnea* (spring heath), *Galanthus elwesii*, *G. nivalis*, and *G. plicatus* (species of snowdrops), *Puschkinia scilloides* (striped squill; "oides" which I love to say ["oy-dees"], means "like" so this species is "like or similar to the squill" aka *scilla*).

Am I brilliant or what? No, I am cribbing from my garden and from a wonderful book, *Gardening with Perennials Month by Month* (2nd edition, revised and expanded) by Joseph Hudak. Hudak's timeline is based on Zone 6 Boston, MA. Although I didn't use her books here, Pam Duthie, our keynote speaker at the 2007 IPHS banquet finale, has a book on month-by-month perennials (*Continuous Bloom*) and another for trees and shrubs (*Continuous Color*). (I buy used hardcover books at [www.bookfinder.com](http://www.bookfinder.com).)

By Diann Thoma, reprinted from the March 2009 issue of the Prairie Hosta Herald, newsletter for the Illinois Prairie Hosta Society

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## the library

If you would like to check out a magazine or book from the library, make out a check in the amount listed next to each book. This will be held as a deposit, which will be returned when the book(s) are returned. One month is generally the checkout time; however, they can be renewed for an additional month. See Ella Maxwell, librarian, at the meetings or call her at 309.444.3758.

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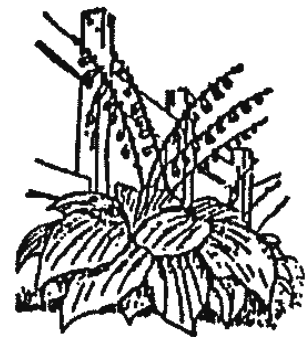
## hosta finders & hosta adventure

**Both will be available at clearance prices at the meetings...while supplies last**

**Hosta Finder**, the 14th edition, lists the complete offerings of 55 nurseries and growers.

**New Hosta Adventure!** It is a very good reference with 32 total pages, and color throughout! Your journey into the world of hosta is incomplete without it. Sections include: Hosta background, Landscaping, Floral arrangements, Hosta Buying, Planting and growing, Propagation, Pests and Diseases, New hostas, Hosta societies and a list of other resources.

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october newsletter deadline:  
september 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009

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cihs membership form (please print)

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