

Official AHS Hosta Display Garden

The Greater Ozarks Hosta Society Garden in the Springfield Botanical Gardens

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An attractive picket fence surrounds a shaded walnut grove where is found one of the most recent hosta gardens to gain official national AHS Display Garden status. This is the Hosta Garden in Close Memorial Park at the Springfield Botanical Gardens in Missouri and maintained by the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society. Wrought iron gates into the garden carry a significant sign that says: *Visitors welcome: the Fence is for the Geese*. Geese can be a problem in the Springfield Botanical Gardens but this sign has more significance because of an historical accident that led to the planning of this fenced-in area. In 1999, the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society's first real attempt to establish a hosta garden in Springfield was at Springfield-Greene County Dickerson Park Zoo, but the freshly planted garden was swiftly devastated by geese. When Close Memorial Park was dedicated in June, 2001, it was decided to establish a bigger hosta garden there, but in consideration of the geese, the fence was built around the area when the garden was developed in 2002. The fence seems to do its job as geese rarely wander into the hosta area, and the grove of walnut trees discourages them from flying in. Attractive wrought iron gates into a garden, however, even if originally installed for a practical reason, do give to this garden an element of mystery and secrecy.

When entering, you pass from the park into something of a fairy wood—a sea of beautiful hostas along meandering paths that are planted with great care to show off the chartreuse and variegated lighter colors against the deep blues and greens. The walnut trees give ample shade for the plants, but shafts of sunlight that play through their foliage add to the mystical fairy-like atmosphere of this peaceful haven. Bob Childress and Dr. Bill Roston, both past presidents of the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society, brought in truckloads of rocks from Dr. Roston's "Garden of Dreams" that now line the Hosta beds in an informal way appropriate to this woodland setting. They also constructed a raised area of rocks where can be found a waterfall and pond that bring sound into the magic of this space. This area also acts as a wonderful setting for weddings or other small social gatherings and is well used during the summer months where the shade is appreciated.

There are hundreds of hostas in this collection. They are planted with few companion plants so as not to distract with fuss and to add to the feeling of serenity and peace. However, groupings of *Chartreuse Cintronelle* and *Palace Purple Coral Bells* have been planted in the display for color to attract the eye and lead visitors through the garden. From an educational point of view, it was thought from the start that the garden should inspire visitors to want to experiment with similar plantings in their own gardens and to see how hostas can be used to edge a walk, frame an entrance, be a focal point, or be just big drifts of ground-cover. The use of color combinations is both pleasing and educational, showing how best to plant a white-edged hosta next to a solid green hosta; or create a blue hosta, yellow hosta, and green hosta combination. There are displays of families of hostas that the home gardener can easily duplicate, such as beds of *H.* 'June' with *H.* 'Halcyon'; *H.* 'Krossa Regal' with *H.* 'Regal Splendor', or *H.* 'Stained Glass' with *H.* 'Guacamole'. All are well-labeled giving intelligence to the design. There are also small collections of mini-hostas and a large bed named "Land of the Giants" that features *H.* 'Sum and Substance', *H.* 'Blue Angel', and *H.* 'Paradigm'. Two wooden, half wine barrels stand just inside one of the gates giving elevation for two *H.* 'Krossa Regals', and the entry path widened in the renovations is lined with a drifts of *H.* 'First Frost'.

In 2011, the Hosta Garden underwent a major makeover through the guidance of Tom Lakowske, current president of the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society. The garden is now divided into two rooms, or distinctive

areas—an event garden for those weddings and parties, and a stroll garden for viewing those hundreds of hosta varieties. This was accomplished by raising rock walls, building an arbor, and planting a low hedge of *Nandina Domestica* growing up from a fringe of caladieae and variegated liriopae. The gardens still flow into each other but the element of hidden secrecy has been enhanced. Two *Seiryu* Japanese maples were added for accent in the stroll garden, and an enlarged formal entry area has also proved to be more suitable for weddings. At first, the mound of rocks around the waterfall had been planted with shade-loving annuals, but in the makeover, permanent plantings of yellow, variegated, and green hostas have replaced them, except in the one corner of this garden where sunlight abounds. Here, a large display of daylilies gives a beautiful backdrop for June and July brides.

Thought has gone into the plantings around the waterfall that are mostly blue liriopae bounding a large flat rock suitable as a seat for bridal photography. The liriopae is pretty resistant to the machinations of excited children, unlike some of the earlier annual plantings, and forms a neutral backdrop, the dark green complimenting wedding clothes.

From mid-June the scapes of the hostas rise from the lush carpet of foliage to produce flowers in shades of pink, purple, blue, and white. Catching the playful filtered sunlight of those shafts within the walnut grove, they give the feeling of an old-fashioned fairies' bluebell wood. The gravel paths are dotted with benches where you can sit awhile in this sublime serenity and listen to the birds, the play of the waterfall, and know that you are close to heaven—a feeling I am sure reiterated by every bride who chooses to be married at this magical place.

Every spring, the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society hosts a hosta dividing seminar to teach the public the best way to divide and multiply their hostas. This is a hands-on seminar using hostas we dig out of this hosta garden. This keeps the garden trimmed as well as enhancing its educational purpose.

We are proud to have this gem of a hosta display garden within the Springfield Botanical Gardens at Close Memorial Park. Much credit for this must originally go to Dr. Bill Roston and Bob Childress, along with Ernie and Mary Lou Braswell for their time and effort in establishing the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society and holding the vision. Thanks, too, should go to Major and Marthe Close whose family made Close Memorial Park a reality, and it is fitting that a very lifelike bronze statue of Major Close weeding in the adjacent White Garden, sculpted by Springfield artist James Hall III, is found just to the left of the main entrance into the Hosta Garden. Others who have played a major part in growing the Greater Ozarks Hosta Society should include the inspiration of Oscar Cross at Hilltop Farms and the promotion of Lee Coates. However, it is under the dynamic leadership of Tom Lakowske that we can now say that our Hosta Garden has become one of the newest such gardens to be nationally recognized by the American Hosta Society as an official Hosta Display Garden. But when we enter the secret garden behind that picket fence, let us also thank the geese that killed the golden egg when they destroyed the hosta garden at the Springfield Dickerson Park Zoo and paved the way for this possibility at Close Memorial Park.