

New Steps In The Ravine

Those of you who have recently ventured down into our Hosta Ravine probably noticed that the railroad tie steps, which we built some 23 years ago, were starting to be a real hazard. Various rotted, split or twisted ties made it clear that the time had come to replace it all. It was not a job that we were looking forward to, but shortly before we closed for the season, we started tearing out the old steps. Our whole crew pitched in, and the steps came out more quickly than I had anticipated.

After considering several alternatives for the new steps, we concluded that concrete would be long-lasting and relatively quick to install. But, of course, we didn't want the look of plain old concrete steps in the ravine. We had seen some stamped concrete that we liked, done by local contractor Mike DeReu. So we called Mike to come look the situation over. He said that it could be done with long chutes as long as we dug out some planted areas so that the concrete truck could get as close as possible to the stairway area.

We picked out the color of concrete that we wanted and the style of the stamping, which would make the steps look like large, irregular slabs of bluestone, and Mike and his hard-working two man crew went to work. After forming up a section and drilling 8-inch holes about 3 feet into the ground, to hold the



steps in place and prevent heaving, they ran re-bar throughout the section and down into the holes. The next day, the concrete truck would arrive and the pour would start.

Concrete work is hard enough by itself, but these guys had to work fast to get the timing just right. They worked hard to get the concrete into the forms, after which they would take a short break of maybe half an hour. Then, much to our amazement, they started taking the forms off. The concrete had set up just enough to hold its shape. They took a large sheet of the chosen stamping form, and laid it on the bottom step and pounded it into the concrete, which was still soft enough to allow the stamp to sink into it. Then they moved to the next step and continued doing a step at a time, but moving quickly all the time. A small piece of rubber form was slapped into the sides of the steps to give them a stone-like appearance. During the stamping process, the corners of the steps round out just a bit on the corners, adding to the stone look.

Mike put the finishing touches on their creation. Using a striking tool, he would continue the line between the "stones" on the top of each stair down and over



Open House And Hosta Walk

Our twenty-third annual Open House and Hosta Walk will be held on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, June 10, 11 and 12. The hostas should be looking great at that time. Refreshments will be served, and drawings for prizes will be held each day. We will also have a selection of specially priced plants, including a good selection of hostas.

Peak bloom seasons: The peak of **iris** bloom is usually the last two weeks of May, although the weather can affect bloom season significantly. The shorter, early bloomers generally start blooming by the first of May. **Daylilies** have an extended bloom season, but the peak season for us generally starts around July 1 and runs for the next three weeks. Some ornamental **grasses** plume out as early as July or August but most, including the spectacular *Miscanthus* varieties, plume out in September and early October.

the front and sides of each stair, giving the finished stair the look of large, laid stones. He sprinkled a little reddish powder coloring here and there to give the stairs a granite look.

Over the course of two weeks or so, they did five sections to complete the project. After it was done and had set up well, they sprayed a sealer over the entire stairway and sprinkled some grit to keep the steps from being slippery when wet.

We are very pleased with the results, and think that the new stairway is a major improvement in our Hosta Ravine.

What's New at Hornbaker Gardens

We have a more complete listing of all of the new plants for 2010 posted on our website. Just click on "New Plants". Let me mention a few about which we are very excited.

Hostas: We all know of a cat that is just too fat, one that is disproportionately wide. (Our Percy qualifies.) The perfectly named Hosta 'Fat Cat' (\$20.00) is a bright yellow hosta with very wide, round leaves. It's like a smaller, brighter 'Sum and Substance' with great texture and puckering. Another good yellow, but with the scarier name of 'The Shining' (\$15.00), is a solid gold version of 'Cathedral Windows' with excellent texture and fragrant flowers.

If you like 'em big, check out 'Final Summation' (\$30.00), a brightly colored sport of 'Sum and Substance'. The giant, slightly cupped leaves are gold with wide, dark green margins. Several green margined sports of 'Sum and Substance' have been introduced over the years, but this one is the best yet. Another monster is 'Empress Wu' (\$20.00), touted as the largest hosta in captivity. Its huge, dark green, and deeply veined leaves form a massive, upright clump. Be careful—small children have been known to disappear into a clump of 'Empress Wu', never to be seen again.

One of our favorite hostas is 'Rainforest Sunrise', a somewhat smaller hosta with yellow/orange centers and dark green margins. The new 'Tropical Storm' (\$20.00) is a reverse sport, with green centers and bright gold margins. Throw in the yellow version, 'Maui Buttercups', and you have a great combination planting of smaller, sister hostas. And if you want to add a blue, 'Deep Blue Sea' is a great blue with cupped, puckered leaves, and it's about the same size as these other three.

Daylilies: 'Buttered Popcorn' (\$15.00) is a rebloomer with a large 6-inch flower of buttery yellow. It produces many blooms per 32-inch scape, and it reblooms reliably. White daylilies are always in demand. We now have Stamile's 'Wedding Band' (\$15.00), with creamy white blooms edged in yellow and a green throat, making for a beautiful color combination.

We have a few new offerings from Bob Ellison. 'Crazy for Love' (\$25.00) is a stunning red. 'Lemon Pucker' (\$15.00) is a bright yellow with heavily ruffled, darker

yellow edges. 'Watermelon Lollipop' (\$15.00) is intense rose with a white midrib. It is nicely ruffled and has a high bud count.

Perennials: We have at least 75 new varieties of perennials this year, including several good **shade** plants. *Astilbe* 'Burgundy Red' has unusual, deep burgundy red buds and flowers that bloom for a long time, and is one of four new Astilbes. *Cimicifuga* has been gaining in popularity, and the new 'Chocoholic' will only add to that because of its shorter, 24"-26" size and fragrant pinkish white flowers. *Heuchera* 'Electra' sports gold to chartreuse foliage with blood red veins, and should be an exciting addition to our already great line of Coral Bells. Two new *Ligularias* sound interesting. 'Midnight Lady' has very dark purple-black foliage and yellow daisy-like flowers. 'Osiris Café Noir' is a dwarf variety, at only 20"-24", with dark purple foliage that turns bronze-green in summer and spikes of yellow flowers. *Tricyrtis* 'Taipei Silk' is a new Toad Lily with larger and more flowers than other varieties.

New perennials for **sun** include *Geranium* 'Perfect Storm', with long-blooming magenta pink blooms with black centers and veins atop low spreading mounds. *Echinacea* 'Hot Papaya' is a double orange pompom, and 'Meringue' is a double white pompom. The names 'Mac and Cheese' and 'Tomato Soup' tell the color of two other new Coneflowers. *Monarda* 'Pardon My Purple' forms a petite clump of glossy green foliage topped with dark purple flowers. The Candy Series of garden phlox are being touted as being brightly flowered, long-blooming, fragrant, more compact at 24", and very resistant to mildew. Names include 'Bubblegum Pink', Coral Crème Drop', and 'Cotton Candy'. Another plant with a candy name is *Stachys* 'Pink Cotton Candy', forming a clump of green, textured leaves with showy spikes of rose purple flowers held above the foliage in early summer.

Trees and Shrubs: This area of our business just keeps growing, due in large part to my inability to resist anything that looks new and interesting. I went on a whirlwind three-day tour of nurseries out in Oregon last fall and couldn't help but order a bunch of new plants from some nurseries with whom we had never dealt before. One of them, Bizon Nursery, has a blue spruce called 'Bizon Blue' that holds

its powder blue color even as the needles age, unlike most blue spruces, whose needles turn from powder blue to dark blue-green during the season.

We've always liked the spreading Juniper 'Daub's Frosted', but Bizon has some gorgeous 'Daub's Frosted' grafted on a standard. They really caught my eye, as did three dwarf Serbian Spruces (*Picea omorika*) with stunning silvery blue-green color. 'Expansa' is a low growing spreader, only 1' tall. 'Minima' is a tight, small globe. And 'Nana' forms a beautiful globe when young. It tries to grow into a squat pyramid as it ages, but I think it can be kept globose with a little judicious pruning.

In Oregon, I also discovered a variegated Dawn Redwood (*Metasequoia*) called 'Jack Frost', which has beautiful ferny green foliage with snow white dots. It grows a little slower and smaller than the species. And I found a very unusual Ginkgo called 'Jade Butterflies', which grows in a dwarf, shrubby form expected to be 4'-5' tall and wide. There are several fantastic yellow evergreens out in Oregon that just make you drool, but most of them don't do well here. One that should is an *Arborvitae* (*Thuja*) called 'Yellow Ribbon', a semi-dwarf, upright form with yellow new growth in the spring, growing 5'-10' tall and 2'-3' wide.

New deciduous trees include a Black Gum (*Nyssa sylvatica*) by the name of 'Wildfire' because of its burgundy new foliage in spring and outstanding red and orange fall color. A dwarf Pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) by the name of 'Jack' is an excellent smaller form, growing only 10'-15' tall and 6'-10' wide, covered with white flowers in spring, and with good reddish fall color.

The world of Hydrangeas has really taken some giant strides. 'Invincibelle Spirit' is an *arborescens* type that is essentially a pink flowered form of 'Annabelle', and it reblooms until frost! 'Vanilla Strawberry' is a *paniculata* type with huge white flowers that turn pink, then red, and hold their color. New blooms keep the multi-color show going into fall, and red stems add winter interest.

I can hardly wait to try out the new, reblooming Lilac (*Syringa*) called 'Bloomerang Purple'. It is a dwarf, shrub form growing 4'-5' tall, and its fragrant flowers appear not only in spring, but again in midsummer, continuing until frost.

New Shop Items

Many of you saw these items last fall because we liked them so much when we saw them at an August trade show that we ordered them in right away, and they proved to be very popular. I'm talking about interchangeable doormats. They come in two parts. First, you need the heavy duty recycled rubber tray. Then you can purchase as many of the colorful mat inserts as you may want. There are oodles of seasonal and holiday themed mats from which to choose. Naturally, last fall, the mats for Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas were big hits. For spring and summer, there are some wonderful pictures of sunflowers, garden flowers, butterflies, and birds. The mats are weatherproof, so they can be used indoors or outside. They are easily cleaned up with a garden hose, using a little dish soap if they have gotten especially dirty. Actually, the mats can be used all by themselves without the rubber tray, but the tray does provide a nice frame, protects the edges of the mat, and is heavy enough that it won't move around.

We also picked up a line of cottages that can be used in a rock garden setting or in a trough. They are as cute as can be, and are patterned after Scottish, Irish, English, French, and Italian cottages of old. Made of weather durable materials, the cottages have removable roofs, making them fun to use as lanterns or key keeps.

A third product line that we liked was a line of hand lotion by Caren Original. According to the Caren flyer "each product has been infused with antioxidants, aloe vera and glycerine to provide ultimate hydration, enhancing your skin's appearance with a radiant and youthful glow." More to the point, the women of Hornbaker Gardens love this lotion, so you might as well give it a try.



Website Improvements

We are in the process of making a nice enhancement of the search mechanism on our online catalog. (We hope it will be done when this newsletter comes out, but if it is not, it will be soon.) When looking at hostas, irises, and daylilies, you will be able to sort using multiple parameters, including colors, sizes, price, and a couple of other inputs, depending on which group of plants you are filtering. For example, you can ask for all of the hostas that are blue, large or extra large, and priced at \$19.00 and under.

Even if you are planning to come here to shop, rather than ordering online, you may find it helpful to use this enhanced filtering ahead of your trip in order to narrow down a list of plants that you might be interested in for a particular location.

Food On Saturdays

We are pleased to let you know that Kramer's Chuck Wagon will again be serving food here on Saturdays during May and the first two Saturdays in June, as well as on Memorial Day, May 31. They will be providing grilled hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken and pork chops. Sometimes they have my personal favorite, ribeye sandwiches. We have some picnic tables in the grassy area near the parking lot available for you to use for a leisurely lunch in the gardens. If you have a large group coming on a Saturday and know that you will be eating here, we suggest that you call us and let us know, so that we can let the Kramers know that they need to bring extra.

The Kramers have been providing grilled catering for years, and they operate Kramer's Kitchen, a fine sandwich shop in the south business district of Princeton, in case you are looking for lunch in town while you are in the area.

'First Frost' Is Hosta Of The Year

Hosta 'Halcyon' has always been one of our best selling hostas because of its wonderful powder blue color in the spring. So it is no surprise that the American Hosta Growers Association should choose 'First Frost', a creamy margined sport of 'Halcyon' as the 2010 Hosta of the Year. It emerges in the spring with that same great powder blue color in the center of the leaves, which are surrounded by creamy yellow margins. As the season continues, the centers turn to a darker blue-green and the margins turn creamier. This hosta has good substance, and continues to look good right up until frost. Like 'Halcyon' it is quite floriferous, with a multitude of lavender flowers in late July.

Some other margined sports of 'Halcyon' have come on the market in

recent years. I love the subtlety of the colors on 'First Frost' and a similar variety named 'Sleeping Beauty'. In those places where you want a flashier hosta with brighter, whiter margins, try 'El Nino' or 'Blue Ivory'.



Photo compliments of Shady Oaks Nursery

We Are Grandparents!

Kathy and I are happy and proud to join the ranks of obnoxious, bragging grandparents. Our daughter Sara and her husband, Mike, are the proud parents of Caleb Thomas Tracey, born on January 19, and weighing in at 9 pounds and 8 ounces. He's growing like a weed, and we look forward to many years of spoiling him. We're pretty sure that he has a greenish tinge to his thumbs.

Getting 'Endless Summer' To Bloom

I recently learned a helpful hint to get your Hydrangea 'Endless Summer' to produce blooms. This plant was developed in Minnesota, where it generally does very well. The reason it tends to do well in Minnesota is that they usually get a lot of snow cover up there, which protects the buds on the stems of the plant. Here, where we often get some really brutal temperatures when there is no snow on the ground, those buds get killed off. To provide protection, just dump a bag of mulch right into the center of the plant in early winter, so that the mulch comes up on the stems a ways. In spring, carefully pull the excess mulch away from the plant to expose those buds that have been protected. We usually cut most Hydrangeas back to knee high in the spring. In order to get blue blooms, use aluminum sulfate or some other soil acidifier each spring, assuming that your soil is not already acidic.

Perennial Of The Year

Baptisia australis is the Perennial Plant Association's 2010 Perennial of the Year. Sometimes known as false indigo, this native species has been around forever, but is not as widely used as it should be. Young plants sold at nurseries often appear sparse or spindly, but will quickly grow to a full sized plant within three years. A mature plant will grow from 3 to 4 feet tall and wide, so keep this in mind when placing it in the garden.

Baptisia is best grown in full sun, but can tolerate a little shade. Plants grown in too much shade may reach for light and need staked as they become floppy. The bluish-green, clover-like foliage itself is very attractive in spring, but then the plant puts on a fantastic show of indigo blue, lupine-like flowers in 10 to 12 inch racemes atop the foliage. The blooms last for 3 to 4 weeks, and are then followed by inflated seed pods that turn charcoal black and are interesting in flower arrangements.

Use *Baptisia* in the back of the sunny border as a specimen, or in small groups where there is room. It is also valuable for cottage gardens, native plant gardens, and native prairies or meadows. It attracts a number of butterfly species to the garden, and is very drought tolerant. There are no serious insect or disease problems—and deer don't even tend to browse on it. It is generally grown from seed because it develops a tap root, which makes it unsuitable for dividing. The straight species is the Perennial of the Year, but you might also want to try one of the newer varieties. 'Purple Smoke' has smoky violet flowers, 'Solar Flare Prairieblues' opens with yellow flowers that turn orange as the flowers go down the stem, and 'Twilite Prairie Blues' has violet blue flowers highlighted with a bright yellow keel.

