

Concrete tour
award and
stone path
descend to
the garden
floor.



Moving and Re-inventing a Patio Garden

text and photos | **Larry Tucker** Memphis, Tennessee

Imagining and creating the perfect hosta garden can be both a labor of love and a challenging chore. Reality, however, never stands still. Fate may intervene in one's profession or retirement may dictate a change in lifestyle or location. Shari and I have experienced both and managed to re-invent a succession of gardens, much like many dedicated hosta friends. As we age, though, it's clear our muscles and minds may not always be up to the task. The Queen of Weedin' from Sweden and I still get down and dirty, but getting back up is another story.

Last year, we were uprooted from our rental townhouse when the gated community owner mandated that we move during renovation and surrender home and garden. Fortunately, before the construction upgrades, a finished unit opened and we moved lock, stock and wheelbarrow around the corner.



above: In high July, Olga Petryszyn's *H. 'Gone with the Wind'* feels right at home in Larry Tucker's Southern garden. Equally comfortable (*from left*) are *H. 'Yankee Blue'*, variegated Solomon's seal, mini hostas in an elevated hypertufa planter and *H. 'White Feather'*.

left: *H. 'Coast to Coast'*, on a pedestal, towers over the patio garden.



H. 'Aphrodite' flaunts fragrant flowers in an extended bloom period.



Shari's watermelon-painted wagon is ready to roll with minis.



Blue chairs and a antique hose-reel table are tucked into a hosta nook.

Similar confines seemed like the perfect fit with a 7-foot stand of *Hosta* 'Royal Standard' at the front door. Contrary to my thrifty Scottish background and do-it-yourself attitude, we hired help and survived the move, though a twisted ankle and hernia for two octogenarians slowed progress. Meanwhile, the promise of a new patio garden out back waited patiently.

When spring 2022 arrived and I pulled back tarps covering potted hostas, the need for a new scheme was evident. The concrete patio outside our back doors again held the high-rise stand of 'Elvis Lives' and a pig trough with miniatures, but the path downhill to the garden floor of pine straw required steps and a safety railing. We had lost several

seasons of shade beneath 50-foot crape myrtles. Still, there was dappled shade beneath tall pines. Also, with the property skewed 90 degrees, momentary north-south sun had shifted to greater east-west exposure, so most of my hostas were candidates for repositioning to endure harsh summer conditions. Thankfully, the community's automated sprinkler

system assured us that the garden would be hydrated, reducing the need for hand-watering.

Arrangement of more than 100 blue ceramic containers across a 20-by-24-foot plot was mind-boggling at first, but the palette was soon transformed into several crescent-shaped patterns—thanks to Shari's artistic talents—that were both inviting and maintainable. Central to these displays along the boundary fence were the ubiquitous garden table and chairs, where we could entertain guests. Elsewhere, in the midst of a hosta bed, we staged intimate seating for two around our converted hose-reel table. Least attractive was a mandated wide path across the garden for maintenance vehicles.

Esthetics aside, positioning of plants was essential for their well-being, allowing giants (such as 'Empress Wu' and 'Potomac

Pride') plenty of room to roam and giving smaller cultivars (such as 'Justine' and 'Jetstream') space to breathe. Shari's watermelon-painted wagon was converted into a showcase for more minis. Under house-hugging red-tipped *Photinia*, I found shady cover for a hard-to-grow *Hosta* 'White Feather', an elevated hypertufa

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stand with minis and the perfect backdrop for a sprawling 'Gone with the Wind'.

Heavily treed Memphis, once known as the hardwood capital of the nation, is now recognized by gardeners as a hosta haven.

The Mid-South boasts mild winters, but summer heat can be extreme, hence timely precipitation is crucial. Climatic conditions bring abrupt swings from deluge to drought. Extended periods of rain and heat influence hosta growth, particularly with plants that demand timely doses of both to show their greatest attributes. Over a span of four steamy weeks in August, my well-watered *H.* 'Aphrodite' bloomed its heart out, fully opening three dozen 5-inch fragrant flowers—teasing me with one or two a day.

As I wander my new plots—with 80 long-lasting 'Royal Standard' blooms out front and ever-blooming 'Aphrodite' out back—I'm a bit *spifflicated* (drunk) from the scents. Or perhaps I'm just happy to be home in the garden. God willing, the creek won't rise (it's across the street) to force another move. ■

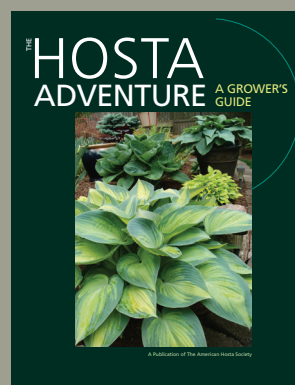
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