

## This Year's Walworth Hosta Fest

By Patricia Walsh



Burlesque! A showstopper developed in Walworth County



Al's Auto Body & Arboretum offers beautiful walking paths

**When it comes to hostas**, what's in a name? Maybe everything! The names Blue Mouse Ears, Praying Hands, Guacamole, and Earth Angel can capture a plant lover's imagination. But how about this name...Burlesque! It's a newly registered hosta offered for the first time by Al Ritchey at Al's Auto Body & Arboretum in Walworth, Wisconsin.

H. Burlesque was discovered and developed here in Walworth County. This medium-sized and proven-to-be-hardy new addition to the hosta world is a sport that first appeared as a plantlet from its mother plant named Striptease. A grower needs faith and patience when something special might appear in the nursery, and Al had both over the next 12 years. He nurtured, developed, and protected the thumb-sized sprout that caught his eye while he was repotting plants sometime around 2010.

Luck or Chance might have been the new plant's name, as Al and his little hosta experienced micropropagation failure, Southeast Wisconsin freeze-thaw-freeze winters, and drowning rain. Any of these could have doomed the tiny plant to the compost pile. Then, when Al's only

specimen was 3 years old, it nearly faced oblivion when it was almost sold to an arboretum customer. Just in the nick of time at checkout, Al's observant son, Sam, realized the plant was Burlesque. "Whew!" said Al, "That was close!"

Why call the new hosta Burlesque? Al said, "Because it puts on a better show." The name may have helped capture the attention of hosta lovers this year in the American Hosta Society's fundraising auction. Al donated one of his unique Burlesques for the 2024 online auction. A bidding war continued right up to and past the auction deadline. The winning bid: \$1,105. Yes, Burlesque puts on an exciting show.

Currently, Al's limited inventory of Burlesque is only available through Al's Certificate & Burlesque Special on his website [HostaFest.net](https://HostaFest.net) or his Facebook page [facebook.com/hostafest](https://facebook.com/hostafest)

Another of Al's Walworth-developed beauties, H. Compadre, was discovered in 1989 when a new plant popped up in the hosta bed after an application of weedkiller. The sight of this hosta had Al humming the Sesame Street song "One of these things is not like the other." He was correct. Divided and nurtured, the plant grew quickly and soon needed a name. The Ritchey family called it Compadre, meaning "trusted friend." It's a fitting name because hostas are known as "friendship" plants that divide easily and can be shared. Compadre, along with 175 other varieties of hosta, will be available for sale at this year's 24th Annual Hosta Fest, where you can stroll the paths of the 5-acre arboretum, enjoy the 450 varieties of hosta, and take home a Walworth County original.

Hosta Fest is May 25, 26, and 27 (Memorial Day) and June 1 and 2, at Al's Auto Body Shop and Arboretum, W6866 N. Walworth Road, Walworth, WI. Admission and parking are free. For Hosta Fest hours and plant lists, go to [HostaFest.net](https://HostaFest.net)



Props to Al Ritchey for getting down and dirty during a cold and rainy day digging in the dirt pulling up an overwintered hosta to show us the white roots that indicated the plant is healthy. He is actually on his knees and not sinking into the dirt.

## Seed Starters – Thank you!

Thank you to volunteers who are helping us start seeds for the Walworth County Fair Grounds! We were gifted 50 or so packets of annuals, perennials, and native plants. Those, along with the natives we ordered, will help fill in the fairground areas we adopted.



## Spring Snow: Poor Man's Fertilizer—True or False?



Is a late spring snowfall “poor man’s fertilizer?” Or is it just someone trying to put a positive spin on a winter that won’t end? Well, it is true that snow is “fertilizer.” When snow falls through the air, it picks up nitrogen compounds from the Earth’s atmosphere. (Nitrogen gas makes up about 78 percent of our air.) As the snow melts, nitrogen is slowly released into the thawing soil.

We know nitrogen helps plants and crops do better because nitrogen makes up part of a plant’s chlorophyll, regulates plant growth and development, and helps roots take up water. Although, we might be a bit unhappy to get out the snow shovel once more, crops and plants welcome a late spring snow.



## **Are You Smarter Than a 5<sup>th</sup> Grader?**

1, Which gas do plants absorb from the atmosphere to use for photosynthesis?

Hydrogen, Oxygen, Nitrogen, or Carbon Dioxide?

2. What is the process by which plants release water vapor into the atmosphere?

Condensation, Precipitation, Evaporation, or Respiration?

3. Which plant does powdery mildew usually affect?

Broccoli, Carrots, Radish, or Zucchini

4. What is the ideal PH for a vegetable garden?

6.0–7.0, 5.5–6.5, 7.0–8.0, or 2.5–3.0

[Answers: 1. Carbon Dioxide 2. Evaporation 3. Carrots 4. 6.0–7.0]

## **Walworth County Master Gardeners Contribute!**

The WCMGVA actively supports and works with a number of organizations, and we have individuals that serve as coordinators for those organizations.

### **The Coordinator's Role**

- Act as a liaison with the organization leader
- Help identify how work is done (work days or assigned gardens)
- Communicate the need for volunteers
- Orient new volunteers

### **Organizations /Projects and Their Coordinators**

- \* Lake Geneva Farmers Market—Julie Hill
- \* Walworth County Fair—Julie Hill
- \* Matheson Memorial Library—Sandy Douglas, Lisa Selje & Sue Markus
- \* Kishwaukee Nature Conservancy—Mary Faith Cook
- \* Delavan Rotary Gardens (Congdon)—Lynda Gruber-Suskey
- \* Badger High School—Sherry Mathews
- \* Walworth County Fair Grounds—Annette Mayfield
- \* Kettle Moraine Land Trust—Tracy Marconnet
- \* Yerkes Future Foundation and SMILES—Sharon Vandenbroucke

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**Gardening Puns**

Frog parking only. All others will be  
toad!

Give weeds an inch and they will take  
a yard.

Weed it and reap!

*(Chippawavalleygrowers.com)*



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