



CHRISTENSEN'S PLANT CENTER

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A worthwhile trip to Hidden Lake Gardens in Tipton, MI

My wife and I took a long weekend to enjoy the beauties of Hidden Lake Gardens and the campus of Michigan State University. Now most of our spouses wouldn't enjoy looking at plants all day, but Jane enjoys the outdoors and hiking and – after 30+ years of hanging with me – she has shown an appreciation for plants and me (YES, IT TOOK THAT LONG).



Everyone should visit Hidden Lake Gardens just to see the difference between a plant grown in the residential landscape and a plant grown in a natural setting. Many of the plants at Hidden Lake are pretty close to full size or at least larger than any specimen you'll see in the landscape. A visit will inspire and amaze. The entry fee is only \$3 and they do offer memberships.

When Michael Dirr tells us a plant will get to be 12-18' tall, but we only want it to get to 4-6' in the landscape, we need to put it in perspective.

First of all, most residential landscapes don't make it past 10 years before being ripped out and re-landscaped. Secondly, these plants are pruned and somewhat dwarfed by micro-climates and the restricted areas in which they are planted. When we design, we should not only look at the eventual size of the plant but also its growth rate. This will give us a better idea about whether the location is right for the plant. Although many *Chamaecyparis* and dwarf conifer varieties grow to 20 plus feet, it will take a long time before it reaches that height at a rate of 1"-6" a year.

Hidden Lake Gardens was donated to Michigan State University (then Michigan State College) in 1945 by Harry A. Fee, an Adrian businessman. The original 200 acres have grown to 755 acres! (I think we walked 700 of them Saturday)

In 1981, Justin C. Harper gave the Gardens a major gift of more than 350 dwarf and rare conifers (cone-bearing plants) which now comprise the Harper Collection. Amazingly, these plants were all transported from Mr. Harper's home in E. Moline, Illinois. This an incredible display, and even after 5 or 6 visits, I am always seeing something different and am still entertained.

The Michigan Hosta Society has also donated plants and their labor to Hidden Lake Gardens. A hosta garden, called Hosta Hillside, came to be where Mr. Fee's original rock garden was. Both of these collections are now supported by separate endowments, the Harper Endowment and the Herb & Dorothy Benedict Hosta Hillside Endowment. When you go, check out the names of these plants. I found hostas named for half of my family members, and I come from a large family.

In retrospect, the visit to Hidden Gardens could have been a big mistake; now my wife wants our back yard to look like the Conifer Collection. Time to move into a condo!

Enjoy the little things in life, Dan



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