



H. nigrescens

This month we devote the newsletter to one of our favourite species of hosta.

An elegant statement plant, *h. nigrescens* adds form and colour to any garden planting scheme...

An architectural beauty

H. nigrescens was first recorded in the late 19th Century and evolved in the northern Honshu prefecture of Aomori.

It has also been found in the two adjacent prefectures of Akita and Iwate - see map opposite.

H. nigrescens was originally considered to be synonymous with *h. sieboldiana* var. *glabra*. However, Maekawa later assigned it as a separate species because it was found growing wild in locations geographically isolated from *h. sieboldiana* var. *glabra*, which was discovered in southern, and south central Honshu.

H. nigrescens has also been referred to as *h. sieboldiana* var. *nigrescens* due to the earlier association with *h. sieboldiana* var. *glabra*.

More recently some doubt has been cast over whether *h. nigrescens* should be designated as a species, because it seems that the plant may change its fertility in succeeding generations, producing fewer viable seeds from fewer pods. This is not a consistent finding, however, and we wonder if environment may play a large part in this development. Hostas can exhibit unusual characteristics in different climates and under more extreme weather conditions. Perhaps, as *h. nigrescens* has been found growing "spontaneous on mountains", it might follow that they prefer those conditions and are more naturally prolific in that environment.

The name *h. nigrescens* alludes to the plant being blackish in colour. However, it is only the emerging shoots that are almost black. The subsequent petioles and leaves are very dark blue-green on top, with lighter blue-green undersides. Both colours are much reduced in obvious intensity, due to the whitish bloom, or pruinosity, on the leaves. This gives them a delightfully subtle colouring, which can appear blue from a distance. Because the leaves are carried on tall petioles, the lighter undersides emphasise the leaf shape beautifully. Lavender flowers, born on scapes which can reach six feet tall, create a pleasing haze effect.

Kuro Giboshi: the black hosta

Evolved in the
northern-most
prefectures
of Honshu

Tokyo



Second generation of *h. nigrescens* 'Elatior':



H. 'All That Jazz'

Cross with *h. 'Christmas Tree Gala'*, registered in 2006



H. 'Ersatz'

Hybrid registered in 1996



H. 'Heavenly Beginnings'

Unregistered cross with
h. 'Dorothy Benedict'

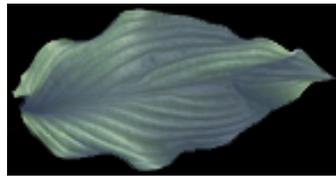


H. 'Key West'

Cross with *h. 'High Noon'*,
registered in 1999

Second generation

The offspring associated with *h. nigrescens* do not all exhibit similar characteristics. *H. 'Tenryu'* is the most similar to *h. nigrescens*, but is less statuesque. *H. 'Krossa Regal'* is the most striking hybrid for colour and bloom - see **February 2012** newsletter for more details of this cultivar:



H. 'Krossa Regal'

Hybrid registered in 1980



H. 'Mardis Gras'

Cross with *h. 'Christmas Tree Gala'*, registered in 2001



H. 'Allegan Emperor'

Hybrid registered in 2000



H. 'Flower Power'

Cross with
h. plantaginea,
registered in 1987



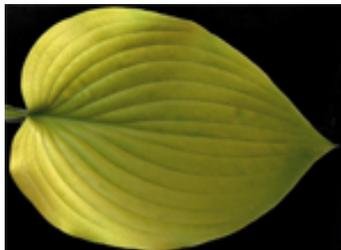
H. 'Garnet Prince'

Hybrid registered in 1991



H. 'Spartan Glory'

Cross with breeders choice,
registered in 2000



H. 'Golden Gate'

Cross between *h. nigrescens* seedling x
h. 'Blue Whirls',
registered in 1994



H. 'Tenryu'

H. nigrescens
background, registered in
2002



H. 'True Blue'

Cross between
h. 'Chartreuse Wedge' x
(*h. nigrescens* x
h. 'Blue Vision'),
registered in 1978



H. 'Spotlight'

Cross with *h. 'Fort Knox'*,
registered in 1995

H. nigrescens 'Elatior'

Known in Japan as Seitaka Kuro Giboshi, the 'black hosta with tall stature', has caused some debate over its relationship to the species. Many experts refer to this cultivar as *h. 'Elatior'* to avoid confusion, whilst still acknowledging the relationship to the species.

H. nigrescens 'Elatior' exhibits characteristics of *h. montana*, which originates in central and northern Honshu - see **April 2010**

newsletter.

Hybrids of *h. nigrescens* can also show these characteristics. So could it just be that the most obvious characteristics of the species, its pruinosity and upright habit, do not often exhibit as dominant features in subsequent generations? If this is so, then should reference to the species parent be omitted in the name? The debate continues...



H. 'Unchained Melody'

Cross with breeders choice,
registered in 2000



H. 'Victory'

Sport registered in 2003

Next month: Our plans for the 2013 season...

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 35 years of experience with the Hosta genus. We are constantly learning and refining that knowledge and would welcome any suggestions that readers of this newsletter would like to make so please **contact us**.

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