

December 2025



Welcome to the 228th issue of our newsletter – the last one!

In January 2007 we launched our newsletter. The previous autumn we added 300 varieties to our collection and were on the cusp of being granted Plant Heritage National Collection status so felt it might be a good platform through which to share our news.

In that newsletter I previewed our upcoming season events and gave a brief overview of hostas – reading it back makes it seem even longer ago than 19 years.

The following month I covered hints and tips for pest control and this became one of the most often read issues of our newsletter over the years. I returned to the subject many times, and still devote a reasonable chunk of my talks to battling pests. It always has been, and probably will continue to be, the number one thing people associate with hostas, which is a huge shame.



Exhibiting

This activity was the source of much content over the 19 years of newsletters and I hope we were able to convey some of the highs and lows we experienced. Of all the situations we have faced as a nation over the years perhaps the most disruptive was the pandemic. We all have memories of this period, which was not all bad but certainly caused a lot of us to re-evaluate what was important.

As 2020 drew to a close we reflected on what was at the time 26 years of exhibiting. [November 2020](#) and [December 2020](#) saw a two-part feature where we shared some of our highlights.

We continued exhibiting at the Suffolk Show and Hyde Hall until 2023, making it a total of 30 years.



Times change and the shows became less profitable so it wasn't a difficult decision to give them up. We still do lots of plant fairs across the region and enjoy them much more.

Videos

Over the past 19 years I have created numerous videos, or mini-movies, as I call them on the website. The following are some of my favourites:

Back in December 2016 we needed to relocate a collection tunnel after selling garden extensions to our neighbours and the following video shows us mid-way through. It was one of those rare occasions when I managed to get Robin on film:



The tunnel has been taken down prior to being rebuilt in its new location. It stayed

Sharing information

The main reason I wanted to create the newsletters was to give me a platform through which to share hosta information as I got to grips with the subject.

I created several series of newsletters focussing on different branches of the genus, special cultivars and species, and key characteristics that allow you to group hostas more sensibly. It is a large genus of plants, which suits being tackled from many angles. Take a look at the [newsletter archive](#) to find these issues, such as the series on identifying hostas:

October 2022



How to identify hostas Part 2

This month we focus on the Tardiana Group and its offspring. The 'Tardiana Group' of hostas was created by the UK breeder Eric Smith and is one of the most commercially successful group of hostas to be produced so far. The image below is of *H. 'Devon Green'*, which is a sport of *H. 'Halcyon'* and nicely illustrates the perfection of leaf shape found in the Tardiana Group and its offspring.



Identifying Tardiana types

From the original Tardiana Group a whole swathe of cultivars has been introduced, coming from individual breeders and from the original collaboration between Eric Smith and a selection of breeders, both in the UK and elsewhere.

Leaf characteristics of the Tardiana Group

The differences between the Tardiana Group cultivars can be quite subtle unless you are looking at them alongside each other. However:

The Tardiana Group

UK breeder Eric Smith found a late flower on his *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans' (below).



All this research allowed me to develop my knowledge to better serve customers and it proved sufficiently interesting to ever more subscribers.

Very early on Dr Warren Pollock started subscribing to the newsletters and he helped me enormously to raise my game. Having not benefitted from a botanical education Warren helped me appreciate the importance of nomenclature, although he could be quite tough with his critique at times. I used to produce a newsletter for the research department at BT and every month I would hold my breath for any negative feedback. It was never easy to attempt to translate highly complex subjects into a form the wider business might understand, and perhaps support. The whole process was lengthy to avoid mis-information, or over-simplifying something, and it meant I had to work closely with some very intelligent folks in their fields, but maybe somewhat lacking in the usual form of social niceties. When I left BT, I left behind a world of technical academic rigour and entered another realm so it was good to get Warren's direction and advice. However, once again, I experienced that old frisson of self-doubt on publishing that an email from the good doctor could induce.

there for a few years but Roy finally removed the last of it in 2024. We are still in the process of dividing and relocating all the plants that were in that tunnel. Most of them went into Tunnel 3, as you can see in the next video, which I filmed in spring 2023:



I did another video a few months later to show the leaves fully out:



Even though these videos were only filmed a couple of years ago, the tunnel has matured greatly since then – the hostas really like their new home despite having limited room to exhibit.

It is a shame that our early days of exhibiting were largely uncatalogued. Robin and Yvonne did upwards of 30 shows a season, each requiring displays.

Robin experimented a great deal during those years using all manner of props and display techniques. He was very forward thinking with his ideas and was often ahead of the curve. Taking a camera to a flower show wasn't part of the toolkit but these days it is a regular part of life with phone cameras being even more versatile. I began creating videos of our flower show exhibits back in 2016. This

I had never intended these newsletters to continue for so long but there always seemed to be a new angle I could concentrate on until more recently when I found I was repeating myself more than I would care to. I wasn't receiving much in the way of suggestions from readers until I was contacted by one of my subscribers, Lenore Tipping, who gave me some lovely feedback back in May 2021. Her obvious love of the plants and happiness in sharing her experiences gave me a fresh perspective. With her help I found a few more angles to explore and she signs off below:

I am sincerely grateful to Mel for 19 years of well-written and informative newsletters! Her efforts have provided a wealth of knowledge, inspiration, and delightful reading. I know I speak for many in saying I will miss the monthly newsletters but will continue to access Mickfield's well-categorized collection of writings. Thank you, Mel! I've learned much from you and I appreciate you.

With gratitude and best wishes,

Lenore Tipping

I do hope you have enjoyed Lenore's contributions as much as I have. I am in awe of her delicious hostas and to have a garden with such a beautiful outlook must be such a joy at any time of the year:



Nursery projects

Over the past 20 years I have been directly involved at the nursery we have embarked on many projects. The most enduring one is trying to beautify the nursery for our own enjoyment, and for that of nursery visitors. I would dearly love to eventually get some hostas in the ground now I no longer have to tote them all over the country but there is still a lot of groundwork needed before we can do that.

Over the past 19 years our climate has changed quite radically too and although we have always been situated in the driest part of the UK, rainfall is getting ever harder to predict. It seems these days we have more intense episodes of weather with prolonged periods of wet or dry.

One of the best experiments I had was with planting hostas in old tyres, creating a '**rubber rockery**'. The theory behind using old tyres was to deter snail damage and they certainly helped mitigate the worst.

was the same year we decided to stage educational displays in order to help engage show visitors a bit more and show the ease and versatility of hostas in gardens of all types.

The most prestigious of our displays earned us the coveted RHS Lindley Award for 2018. It was for our display at Hampton Court:



In my opinion this wasn't our best display. By July colours and leaves are starting to fade a little. I always thought our displays at Gardeners' World in early June looked the most vibrant and appealing – helped in part to the quality of light in the Floral Hall at the NEC. One year we came second for Best in Show, narrowly losing out to Birmingham City Council.

I made videos of all our displays from 2016 through to 2019 and created an accompanying plant list for each. I tell you about the plants as we move around each display. Visit our [video archive](#) to view them all.

One of the most commented on features in our later displays (2018-19) are the hanging baskets and in the following video I explain how to create them:



Being black they absorbed heat and helped isolate the hostas from the surrounding land. Surprisingly they didn't require any more water than other container-based hostas but getting around to watering them on top of the demands of the collection and sales plants meant they did struggle a bit. Also, when we sold garden extensions to our neighbours, and took down tunnel 5, we decided to stop access to that part of the nursery to give our neighbours more privacy. As a consequence we didn't get round there very often. I decided to remove the hostas and at some point I will also remove the tyres. I'm in two minds whether to try again around the reservoir.

Over the past couple of years we have attacked the banks of the reservoir to bring them down and enable access to the water. This project has been beset by weather problems, not least of all the fluctuating levels of water within the reservoir. As a consequence my plans to plant up the interior had to be abandoned but always a pragmatic I figure the area is best left largely as a wildlife haven. We are removing some of the banks and making the remainder more shallow. We are also digging down to create a planting shelf around two sides. We are planning it as we go because we can never predict when the weather will allow us to make progress. We would very much like to be able to sit nearer the water and enjoy the view, which is something we can all agree is a worthwhile project. Aside from landscaping projects are all the maintenance work and we still have around 30 poplars to fell – plenty to keep us out of mischief.

Over time I will remove all but the special issues of the newsletter to free up some web space but I hope you have enjoyed them. Much of the frequently asked about information will still be available on the FAQ page, and elsewhere on the site.

Please be assured that although the newsletter will be no more, we will still be out and about at plant fairs, giving talks and available at the nursery during the season. Do keep an eye on our website for the latest developments, and our most up to date plant lists of course.

[Thank you for being a great audience and happy gardening](#)
Team Mickfield Hostas

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This video was created as content for the Virtual Flower Show, an event pulled together by Dibleys Nursery, as none of us were able to exhibit in person during Covid (2020). Not being able to exhibit for most of 2020 was a huge blow to many exhibitors as the shows represented a large chunk of annual income. Fortunately, our mail order service was able to pick up the demand and we spent a lot of time selecting, preparing and posting out consignments across 2020. Back in 2016 Roy and I created a short video showing our mail order process:



Roy has since worked on perfecting the packaging so we use less of it and is able to create bespoke packaging to suit each consignment.

On our [video archive](#) you will find videos featuring projects undertaken at the nursery. Some projects we abandoned and some continued – there's no standing still in Mickfield!