



Hosta pycnophylla

This species can be found in the parentage of a number of architectural cultivars we love...

You may remember this photo of [Hosta 'Totally Twisted'](#) from June 2018 when we reviewed the Malvern Spring Festival. This cultivar caused quite a stir with its fantastic pink petioles...



Researching linkage

One of the benefits of creating a database of our collection is the ability to identify common threads and find out why certain cultivars stand out from others. Although our collection is not definitive, it is large enough to be indicative and is now represents a good jumping off point for further research.

One such thread features the offspring of [H. pycnophylla](#), which is perhaps one of the lesser known species. It has a number of rather lovely characteristics including wavy leaf margins, very white leaf undersides and reddish-purple petioles. The species is native to a handful of Japanese islands and is called the 'Setouchi hosta', which means "densely arranged leaves". Cultivars from *H. pycnophylla* tend to begin growing in quite an open habit but they quickly develop a denser mound as they mature. This species shows similarities to another, [H. hypoleuca](#), which was the subject of a newsletter back in [December 2014](#). Both species have the white leaf undersides that makes them excellent specimens for growing in pots but perhaps *H. pycnophylla* has the edge



An architectural gem

This beautiful cultivar, [Hosta 'Cutting Edge'](#), comes from a crossing of [H. 'Salute'](#) with [H. pycnophylla](#). Both parents bring distinct

with its colourful petioles and prolific leaves?

***Hosta pycnophylla* offspring**

The first generation of offspring includes:

[H. 'Chopsticks'](#) - this cultivar has the red colour of the petioles extend into the midrib of the leaf

[H. 'Cutting Edge'](#) - see side column - we love this cultivar!

[H. 'Gilt by Association'](#) - a fabulous gold-leaved offspring with the characteristic architectural structure

[H. 'Paradise Red Delight'](#) - this cultivar has more rounded, greener leaves and red petioles.

[H. 'Quill'](#) - see side column - a smashing cultivar

[H. 'Theo's Blue'](#) - almost smokey in appearance, the blue leaves and pink petioles make this a stunner

[H. 'Totally Twisted'](#) - see photo at the head of the newsletter. Once again it is a densely packed leaf mound typical of other *H. pycnophylla* offspring.

Successive generations

It is worth mentioning a couple of next generation offspring: [H. 'Sky Dancer'](#) is a hybrid of *H. 'Paradise Red Delight'* as well as being the pollen parent of [H. 'Frisian Waving Steel'](#). Both *H. 'Sky Dancer'* and *H. 'Frisian Waving Steel'* share beautiful blue leaves with white undersides. The former has a turquoise hint and is aptly named. The latter is a very intense velvety steel blue and holds this colour in shade the whole season.



One of the characteristics we particularly like in this branch of the genus is the tendency for the flower scapes to emerge horizontally between the leaves. This characteristic is the reason I exhibited [H. 'Shimmy Shake'](#) at Hyde Hall Flower Show in August last year. The photo above clearly shows the flowers hanging below the leaf mound where I placed it centre stage in the display. It made me wonder if there was *H. pycnophylla* in the parentage. Unfortunately the

characteristics to the development of this plant.

It is a marriage of characteristics that has resulted in one of the best garden cultivars we have planted out in recent years.

The image below, shows how the leaves seem to argue with each other as they emerge. The *H. 'Salute'* characteristic of leaves folded at the midrib allows the leaves more space as they emerge. When they come into contact with other leaves they fold over each other.

This accentuates the form and shows the white undersides to great effect.



[Hosta 'Cutting Edge'](#)
in Mel's garden



A riot of leaves

[Hosta 'Quill'](#) shares characteristics of two species: *H. pycnophylla* and *H. yingeri*. The former ensures a densely packed plant mound with numerous leaves. The latter is best known for the spider like flowers, which look like little

parentage is recorded as unknown but I wouldn't be surprised if this cultivar is related, it shares rippled leaf margins and the fountain shape of the other cultivars too.

Exceptions that prove the rule

Although we are often singing the praises of older varieties, there are some branches of the genus that continue to produce enhancements that are improvements on previous generations. When you compare *H. pycnophylla* with the offspring we have featured, each grows better, more reliably and provides more definition of the shared characteristics. As ever, it takes a little maturity in the cultivars to see the differences fully, but it is a joy to track the changes and is well worth the wait. It's what gardening is all about and, as the first shoots of spring are already emerging in the tunnels, the promise of the new season is building.

Speak soon

Team Mickfield Hostas

sparklers.

The combination is glorious and looks equally good in a container or in the ground, particularly planted near rocks.

We used to have *H. yingeri* in the collection but lost it several years ago.

One of the dilemmas of holding a National Collection is trying to balance the need to catalogue and have accessible examples of plants whilst trying to keep the plants happy and healthy in conditions they are perhaps not accustomed to. In many instances our plants are a little too cossetted and thrive in much less luxurious conditions!