



Behind the scenes...

This month we have decided to devote the newsletter to the 'back room' activities that go on around the nursery at this time of the year. Such activities help us operate more effectively, so we can devote more time to the plants.

So what have we been doing lately?

Our hostas may be enjoying a well deserved dormancy, but it is still a busy time for us.

Cataloguing the collection

This is the time of year we update our collection database. This involves researching information about varieties we have recently added to our collection, and those we hope to introduce for sale in the forthcoming season.

We try to capture as much information as possible for our own reference, and to use in our catalogue and website. A recent update made to the Hosta Register resulted in a lot of amendments. We cross-reference our information with the Hosta Register to ensure we are up to date for registered varieties. For unregistered varieties we use a number of other sources to build a set of expected characteristics. These can be updated as the parent plants mature, and more details about their characteristics can be confirmed.

It is an ongoing process but really important to maintain. It is essential for cataloguing and managing the collection, as well as providing the data we need for the website and catalogue.

Website updates

This is an important activity as so many people now use our site. Our peak month of interest is May and, looking at past statistics, we hope to exceed 1 million hits this coming May - click on the graph to see the hits for May since 2001.

Since we set up the website in 2001 our customers have given us some valuable feedback, and it is apparent to us that you really appreciate the service it provides. We set the site up as an information resource to support existing customers, and it is built with customer service in mind. This is what you have told us:



• Sharing information

You like the information we give and appreciate our **monthly newsletters** very much. This is a really important aspect to our business, as it enables us to communicate with customers year round. It also helps us promote organisations we work closely with, such as Plant Heritage, the RHS, NEHS, and others. The hosta genus is fascinating, the more we learn, the more we feel there is to learn, and we want to share this with you.

Around the nursery

Robin has been creating a new potting compost system in the room backing onto the existing packing shed.

We mix our own potting medium and previously we have done this in the packing shed, which has meant clearing the space and wheeling in the machinery for the duration of the process and then wheeling it all out again and storing it.

As we need to store the potting compost components, and mixing equipment, somewhere dry, it makes sense to do the mixing in the same place to avoid lugging heavy bales around. The new arrangement means we can make up the mix and transport it from the storage room into the packing shed, via a conveyor system through the wall. The mix runs off the top of the conveyor belts and into hoppers above the potting bench - brilliant!

Yvonne has been getting to grips with the office move (she knows there is a desk in there somewhere). Before the start of the season we need to move a lot of equipment and bookwork into our new office in the packing shed.

- **Buying from us**

You like being able to discuss your orders with us. We are happy to advise and make suggestions to help you decide what to buy. You cannot easily replicate this facility through the website. We try to make it as easy as possible to order from us, as not everyone is happy to trust the Internet with their personal details and since 30% of the UK population do not possess a computer, a large number of customers appreciate the fact that we do not focus entirely on Internet sales.

- **Searching versus listing**

You like the way we present our information in alphabetical lists! Search engines are great, but trying to create one for the varieties is problematic due to the need to re-classify the information we hold about the collection. Attempts to categorise our collection according to leaf colouration resulted in 54 combinations and even then we were left with anomalies. Having to define a category before you can search under it rather negates the simplicity of a search engine. Therefore, we returned to your comments and, as we are most often asked for varieties with a specific plant size, leaf colour, flower, we decided to list the collection along these lines too - you can now browse the following categorised lists:

- **plant size**
- **dominant leaf colouring**
- **leaf colour changes**; lutescence, albescence and viridescence
- **flower colour**
- **flower fragrance**

- **Good, old-fashioned service**

You like the service we give you, making ourselves as available as possible, either at shows, at the nursery, or on the phone/email. It is essential for us to understand what it is you want, so we encourage this. You say what you like about the website, so we improve it along those lines and we welcome your suggestions for future improvements.

Coming up...

Over the next couple of months we will be extending our website to include even more information.

Instead of being directed to the Hosta Library, when clicking on the existing 'more images' links, you will be directed to our own images and information via a **'more information'** link. Click on the image opposite to visit a sample page.

This update will hopefully avoid any confusion visitors might experience when being directed to an alternative website to view images.

Obviously, it will take us a while to build up our own comprehensive library of photographs to use within this new feature, so it will expand gradually as the season unfolds - we hope you like it.



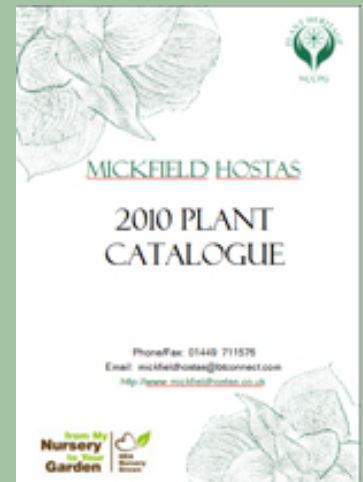
Next month: We feature an early spring favourite, *h.* 'Sagae'...

It will be great not to have to keep traipsing back to the bungalow to print labels and find information, etc.

Melanie has been updating the collection database, the website and creating the 2010 catalogue. We throw her a banana occasionally to keep her strength up.

2010 Plant Catalogue

Although the website has greatly reduced the need for us to produce catalogues in great numbers, it is still a very useful tool.



Click on image to download catalogue

As usual our catalogue is a simple design and non-glossy. We produce it, so we can control costs and run off copies as required during the season. That way we feel we don't need to charge for it. We link the catalogue from our website because you told us that you like to have something you can carry around with you, and make notes on!

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 30 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](#).