

January 2025



## *Happy New year*

As promised, we kick off this year's newsletter cycle looking at varieties we have found to be 'great growers', and which deliver in a garden, whether grown in the ground or in pots.

Last month Lenore kicked off the series with a look at [H. 'Sum and Substance'](#). This month I feature two cultivars which work hard in many ways, [H. 'Shimmy Shake'](#) and [H. 'Mrs Minky'](#), and another for its seasonal colour changes, [H. 'Southern Gold'](#), all of which are great growers...



## *The role of these great growers*

Plants that grow well are so very useful in the garden, not least of all because you can divide them and plant the divisions alongside the original to create a sweep of colour, or plant elsewhere as individuals to tie a planting scheme together. Repetition is a great way to create continuity in a scheme, allowing the plants to show off in their own right but to also provide a framework against which to try other plantings, not necessarily hostas.

I always tried to pick very similar coloured containers to play this trick within the confines of a floral display. The pots looked attractively coordinated whilst displaying the hostas without dominating the scene.

### ***Hosta 'Shimmy Shake'***

The photo above features *H. 'Shimmy Shake'* in the centre, which is a great grower, and very architectural. It looks brilliant in a container as a specimen but it also looks great edging a water feature, or perhaps grown to hide a ugly piece of hard landscaping. Indeed, it grew well in one of the tyres in the rubber rockery until it got too large for the

## *The effect of light levels*

As my photographs illustrate in this newsletter, light levels play a big part in how your hosta will look during the season. May and June are when hostas are generally at their most vibrant. As the season progresses their colours often change in subtle ways.

Exhibiting hostas takes a toll on the plants, which manifests itself in more rapid changes of colour. The transportation and display of plants indoors can affect the quality of the leaves

space. The leaves hid the top of the tyre so the effect was very pretty. This is a medium-sized cultivar with a plant mound 14" tall by 24" in diameter. The leaves emerge matt yellow and stay that colour until late summer. The close up of the plant taking centre, from the photo above, taking stage in a display at Gardeners World in 2011:



By August the bloom that created the matt effect to the leaves is fading to reveal satiny leaves, which are greener in appearance, as the photo below shows, taken at the 2019 Hyde Hall Flower Show:



The lavender flowers emerge randomly among the leaves and droop downwards with attractive bird-beak like buds. You can just see the red spotted petioles between the leaves. The red stems are more obvious against the early spring foliage before the leaves are fully unfurled. If you choose to grow this variety in a container, the red stems are usually more visible between the leaves which can layer in a more open habit than if grown among other planting in a mixed border. The leaves are quite large in relation to the size of the plant at 10" long by 6" wide, and they have wavy margins that end at slightly twisted tips. The overall effect is one of movement, even on a still day.

to make them appear more muted. Also, I don't like to play around with the colour balance of the photos I take because I don't want to mislead customers into thinking they will look the same way for them when grown outside.

Featuring *H.* 'Shimmy Shake' inadvertently reminded me of this fact, which is why I am explaining it here. The photos illustrate well how different a plant can look when inside rather than outside.

I am often asked whether hostas can be grown indoors and, although they can physically be grown indoors, they are never as vibrant as they will be if they can benefit from the full spectrum of light they receive when grown outdoors, even in deep shade.

### **Viridescence**

A large number of hostas turn green by some degree during the season. This is called viridescence and can be a useful thing to know about when planning a garden scheme.

It is more pronounced in varieties which emerge with a bloom, which then fades as the season progresses. By autumn many varieties will have changed colour, some quite subtly but with others it can be quite dramatic.

To illustrate this effect, I can highly recommend *H.* 'Southern Gold'. This cultivar is a medium sized plant 16" tall by 25" in diameter. The matt yellow spears emerge in spring with pink sheaths, which creates an effect rather like the colours of Fruit Salad chews (those of a certain age may remember

The prominent veins add to the structural quality of this cultivar and is something I find very appealing. This cultivar divides beautifully and is worth doing periodically to ensure it doesn't become too crowded.

### ***Hosta 'Mrs Minky'***

If you are looking for a cultivar that provides a similar effect but remains yellow all season then *H. 'Mrs Minky'* is hard to beat. It is a smaller variety but we find it grows slightly taller than its registered dimensions of 9" tall by 22" wide. It is a quick as well as a reliable grower and the wavy margined leaves look almost lacy. Like *H. 'Shimmy Shake'* the leaves of *H. 'Mrs Minky'* are large for the size of plant at 6" long by 3" wide. They are carried on longer petiole so layer up beautifully making a dense mound of foliage as it matures. The flowers appear on more upright scapes so poke through the foliage in a rather charming way. I have used this cultivar numerous times in displays for its beautiful habit. The photo below shows it looking green rather than yellow at Gardener's World in 2019:



I describe the effect of light on display plants in the side column. With this cultivar it usually gets its mojo back within a few days once back at the nursery and looks matt yellow again.

This cultivar has become a bit more popular recently, perhaps customers are just noticing it's potential even as an immature sales plant. What attracts people to certain plants varies, not just with exposure and promotion. Often there are more subtle influences at play. Last year I sold more of these two cultivars than usual because suddenly people noticed them, which is why I thought I would feature them early on in the series. I will have them for sale again this year.

Speak soon,

Team Mickfield Hostas

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them well). It's almost as if the plant is offering something dramatic even before the leaves unfurl. When they do unfurl, they are a rich satiny, golden yellow and quite textured:



After a few weeks the leaves start to develop a bloom which makes the vibrancy fade into a lovely light matt yellow. By summer the leaves turn matt green and look especially good when situated among shiny or highly textured plantings. The texture evens out to flatter leaves after the first few weeks, which enhances its use as a foil for other textured planting.

I tend to sell more of *H. 'Southern Gold'* in spring as the colours hit you in the eye but by late summer they have become too subtle to jump out among the wide variety on offer. But this masks their true value, which can be appreciated more by visiting the collection and seeing their seasonal colour changes in a more natural environment.