



## Viridescence in hostas

This term describes how spring leaf colour is lost as the season progresses.

It is a characteristic that can add seasonal interest to the garden and extend the value of those cultivars that exhibit it. As many viridescent cultivars are now showing their summer plumage we thought this an ideal time to return to the subject...

### Green is the colour

Every spring the wait for the newly emerging hosta shoots is doubly rewarded by the viridescent varieties exhibiting their spring colour.

It is important to realise that viridescent varieties will turn green as the season progresses but this colour change doesn't always happen quickly. Indeed, the more shade you give a viridescent variety, the longer the spring colour will generally last. We take a selection of viridescent varieties to the early spring shows and usually find they have lost quite a bit of their colour when they are put back into the collection alongside the other plants on our return. This is because they are subject to much more light than they experience in our shade tunnel.

A very popular cultivar is *h.* 'War Paint' and we took this variety out to the Harrogate Spring Show earlier this year. As the photos show, the parent plant, that went to the show, has begun to lose its colour whereas its companion is still looking colourful.



*H.* 'War Paint' back from Harrogate



*H.* 'War Paint' left at nursery

Even now, the *h.* 'War Paint' that remained at the nursery is still showing more colour than the one that went to the show, which is looking much more like its parent, *h.* 'Niagara Falls'. Both cultivars exhibit the same elegant cascading habit but the leaves of *h.* 'War Paint' are generally larger than that of *h.* 'Niagara Falls'. It is like having two cultivars for the price of one and if space is a premium in your garden then perhaps choosing a viridescent variety can make better use of that space. Some viridescent cultivars lose their colour more quickly despite their growing conditions. One such cultivar is *h.* 'Guardian Angel', which although it loses its colour quite quickly, does retain the grey-green characteristic that makes it a

### Gardeners' World Live 2009

Although we found Gardeners' World Live 2009 to be a bit of a disappointing show, we were delighted to be judged 'The Best Exhibit in the Plant Mall' and receive this lovely glass vase:



This is the highest award we have achieved to date for an exhibit and the vase is a lovely shape for displaying cut leaves.

good foil for other plants which take longer to emerge in the spring. *H.* 'Fallen Angel' is a sport of *h.* 'Guardian Angel' but less dramatic in its variegation:



*H.* 'Guardian Angel'



*H.* 'Fallen Angel'



*H.* 'Fortunei Albopicta'

The new leaves of *h.* 'Fallen Angel' come through very pale grey-green with prominent dark veins and then the leaves gradually turn the same colour as the veins. It would be a good choice to lighten a dark corner of the garden.

One of our favourite viridescent cultivars is *h.* 'Fortunei Albopicta' - opposite, which is a giant variety that keeps its spring colouring well into late May and gradually becomes more subtle as the season progresses. It is an older variety that is very garden-worthy. A full list of viridescent varieties, that we hold in our collection, can be found [here](#).

### Beyond the pale

The creation of a 'white' hosta seems to be grabbing the hosta breeding world and there have been a number of introductions over recent years that show how this may eventually be achieved. However, unless the plant has a degree of green in the leaf it will not be a strong grower. Plants need to produce chlorophyll in order to be able to photosynthesise and grow - white leaves do not permit this to happen. The plant weakens quickly because it cannot produce sufficient food.

Even the newest white introductions are not strictly white, more a very light shade of green or streaked green and if they are not viridescent they will not survive for long. This sums up the properties of *h.* 'White Feather', the number one cultivar currently seducing customers with the promise of something different. *H.* 'White Feather' is a problematic plant and will not reliably turn green. We have had so many queries about it this year and we cannot believe how many people spent good money on it, so we issue the following warning:

### Caveat emptor... buyer beware of *h.* 'White Feather'

Naturally the companies selling this plant are not willing to disclose its shortcomings because it would impact sales. We do not recommend people buy it without considering the fact that it is unlikely to survive beyond a couple of years.

**Next month:** We complete the parentage story of *h.* 'Dorothy Benedict'...

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](#).

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Unfortunately, this year the show did not attract as many gardening visitors as usual or as many horticultural exhibitors. We were pleased to see many of our regular customers but whether there was sufficient content to encourage them to return again next year remains to be seen.

### Stand details

As we head into our busiest month of the season, we would like to remind you that we will be exhibiting at the **Hampton Court Show** inside the Floral Marquee (FM19) and outside in the Plant Mall (B74). We will also be at the **Tatton Park Show** exhibiting in the Floral Marquee on stand FM39.

We have a new show to add to our 2009 tour, **Wisley Flower Show** on 11-13 September. More details about these shows can be found by following the show links on our shows page.