



Blooming lovely!

This month we are investigating hosta flowers. This is a subject more of you are asking about, especially as so many varieties are flowering early this year...

Do all hostas flower?

It seems an odd question as most people would understand that this is how plants reproduce in nature. Some hostas may only flower as they mature, whilst others produce masses of flowers, such as *H. 'Drop Drop'*, pictured below:



When do they flower?

Flowering is triggered by the plant undergoing some form of 'stress'. This is usually seasonal and indicates the most appropriate time to flower for the best reproductive results. For hostas grown in the UK this trigger usually occurs from June through to August. Fragrant varieties tend to flower from August onwards, generally requiring the warmth of late afternoon and evening sun, to encourage flowering. West-facing patios and sheltered spots with a background wall, which has absorbed heat during the day and then radiates that warmth into the evening, are ideal. Fragrant varieties all originate from *Hosta plantaginea*, the 'Old August Lily'. This is the only fragrant species yet identified and has large white trumpets, which smell divine - check our **Fragrance list** for more details. We will be taking a selection of the more interesting fragrant varieties to our July and August shows.

Why is there a limited colour palette?

Flower colours vary from white through to deep purple because all species exhibit this colour range.

Most cultivar flowers have a white background with any colour streaking or suffusing through, giving a subtle hint of colour or, in some cases, a striped appearance, such as the flower of *H. 'Rhein'*.

Many people have asked us about this image, which we use in our promotional literature because it is striped and appears large in comparison to the surrounding leaves. The size of the flower in the picture is an optical illusion achieved by taking the photograph from below the flower head.



H. 'Rhein'

Our busiest month...

July finds us travelling across the country for a feast of floral fun. Click on the posters to visit the event websites...

We start by heading south to the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show:



Here you will find us towards the rear of the Floral Marquee, near the toilets. There is a theme developing here for those of you familiar with our usual spot at Harrogate!

Next we travel west to the Stratford Home and Garden Show:



This is a brand new show

Many of the Tardiana Group have very similar flowers. Find out more in our **July 2007 newsletter**.

Do all hosta flowers grow in the same way?

Hosta flower habits vary almost as much as the cultivars they belong to. Many grow upright, on elongated scapes. Just as many varieties have spreading flower scapes and some flower heads are so heavy they bend the scapes as they develop. One of Mel's favourites, *H. 'Neptune'* sends a multitude of flowers out from the crown in a spray. They are hidden at first within the mass of leaves and then they appear almost horizontal, enhancing the architectural shape of the plant.



H. 'Blue Mouse Ears'

Conversely, some varieties have short flower scapes. The 'mouse' series of hostas are a delight, carrying their flowers almost like hyacinths - left. *Hosta 'Sum and Substance'* - right, has lovely large buds, as do many of the cultivars developed from it. They are quite distinctive to that specific branch of the genus.



H. 'Sum and Substance'



In a quite different way, *H. sieboldiana* types have distinctively crowded flower heads, for example *H. 'Blue Mammoth'*, left.

These flower heads last for quite a while as they gradually open from the bottom buds, upwards. They really are eye-catching blooms. You can see a similar development of the flower heads, but on a much smaller scale, with the Tardiana Group of hostas. This is because they share *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans' characteristics.



H. 'Beckoning'

One to look out for...

One of our feature plants for the July shows is *H. 'Beckoning'*, a wonderful cultivar, which starts the season with plain blue leaves. The leaf centres gradually turn lighter and brighter to give the most fabulous variegation later in the season. This centre lutescence is not as common as the spring variegation which fades (viridescence) and can create a very eye-catching feature in a border when other plants are losing their summer colour. Keep a look out for it on our displays. It has beautiful flower buds too...

We plan to feature more about the flowers of this brilliant genus in the future.

Next month: Flashback to July shows...

and we are very excited to be a part of it. It promises to be good, with lots of your favourite exhibitors attending, so why not give it a go?

Then we travel north to the Tatton Park Flower Show:



If you have never been, why not try this event. It is in a lovely location, which the resident deer kindly allow us to invade each year.

Finally we end July by heading south again to the **Hyde Hall Flower Show**.

We will be bringing oodles of fabulous plants with us to tempt you and we are looking forward to seeing lots of you on the road, whilst we are away. Don't forget the nursery will be open every day throughout July, where you can catch up with Robin and Yvonne.

Advance warning!

The nursery will be closed on Sunday 24th August for a private event.

We will be open either side of this date, over the Bank Holiday weekend, as usual.

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 38 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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