



Green and white variegation

Over the years we have seen many hostas wax and wane in their appeal but green and white variegated cultivars seem to be enduringly popular. However, some of these varieties can be problematic to grow...

Popularity contest

Although we were aware that green and white variegated hostas were popular, we were surprised at the attention they created when we displayed an educational exhibit based on the the H. 'Francee' branch of the genus in the Plant Heritage Marquee at Hampton Court in 2011 - see **August 2011 newsletter**.

We featured, in the display, some of the most popular cultivars which have been introduced over the past few decades, and shared our experience of growing them. We sold out of all the sales plants we took in support of the exhibit, even the most expensive, newly introduced cultivars.

We were keen to show how successive generations of offspring often look very similar as immature plants, only becoming discernibly individual with maturity.

We also highlighted the issue of seemingly identical cultivars, from the same parental origins, and how they can differ in growth potential, using **H. 'Fire and Ice'**, **H. 'Paul Revere'**, **H. 'Loyalist'** - opposite - and **H. 'Flash of Light'**.

We found our experience of growing the four varieties bore out the findings of the American Hosta Society's investigation, which can be viewed on their **website** as a sample article. *Hosta* 'Paul Revere' grows well but is not readily available. Therefore, we promote H. 'Loyalist' but still sell H. 'Fire and Ice' with the caveat that it can be temperamental - people just love the name.

A much better bet for that brilliant flash of white is **H. 'Vulcan'**.



Hosta 'Frosted Jade'

This fabulous cultivar has **H. montana** origins, which are evident in the leaf shape and prominent veins. The colour is muted grey-green with grey streaking to the midrib. The white margins become more rippled with maturity and accentuate the leaf shape beautifully - a great giant for any garden.

Teething problems

If a cultivar has a lot of white in the leaf it tends to be a slower grower and more susceptible to scorching. We always advise customers to seek a variety with a solid, strong green margin or centre, as this is the productive area of the leaf, and is key to the plant's survival as a variegated cultivar. Some varieties will only have their variegation for part of the season with the white areas of the leaf turning green. Any leaves emerging solid green need to be removed, ideally at the root level, in order to help prevent the whole plant losing its variegation.

Cultivation tips

A few extra pointers in looking after a hosta with white in the leaf:

1. give it plenty of shelter/shade to avoid the risk of scorching
2. apply a slow release, gentle feed for the roots to help the plant
3. water from below so your plant can take all it needs and you do not risk the plant drying out. If your plant is in the ground remember to water occasionally if the weather is very dry.

Top twenty

Our alphabetical list contains several varieties which will coincidentally feature in our exhibit at Hampton Court Palace Flower Show:

H. 'Allan P McConnell'
H. 'Bold Edger'
H. 'Clifford's Stingray' - below:



Some very popular varieties sold in the UK have this tendency. As a consequence of these issues we are finding it difficult to accept the assignment of Award of Garden Merit (AGM) status to **H. 'Revolution'**, **H. 'Fireworks'**, **H. 'Whirlwind'** and **H. 'Spilt Milk'**. Every year we have to weed out a percentage of these varieties, which have emerged all green. They are doing this in the protective environment of a nursery, so we are duty bound to mention this to prospective purchasers.

So, having sounded rather negative so far, where does that leave us with our list? It's easy really, because there are some excellent green and white variegated cultivars you can expect to have success with in your garden. Our top twenty are listed in the side column, and below we highlight some of them in more detail:



Hosta 'Midnight at the Oasis' - opposite - is proving not only reliably stable, it grows extremely well too. In our experience, this unregistered sport of **H. 'Pathfinder'** is a vast improvement on the parent, which we find can be problematic and liable to reversion. It might be due to the reduced amount of time the leaf centres stay white before developing a green haze. This makes more of the leaf area available for the production of food to feed the root, for a longer period during the season.

Another cultivar we recommend is also related to *H. montana*. **Hosta 'Crispula'** shares the elegant leaf shape, sheen and habit of *H. montana*, and has a rich clarity of colour. It has quite startlingly white rippled margins, which streak towards the midrib in flashes of grey.

It is a large variety so doesn't grow to the same stature of *H. 'Frosted Jade'*, if your space is limited.



On the smaller end of the scale we recommend the following:



H. 'Allan P McConnell'



H. 'Lime Fizz'



H. 'Rock Island Line'



H. 'Tsugaru Komachi'

You will notice that all the little ones we recommend have delicate white margins rather than a striking white centre. We have found those with white centres can be very difficult to grow. They struggle to get established and often have very stringy root systems, which can prove to be insufficiently robust to support the plant. Our recommended varieties are not only robust, they produce generous amount of leaf, creating lovely neat mounds of foliage

Next month: As August approaches we look at the best fragrant varieties...

- H. 'Crispula'**
- H. 'Francee'**
- H. 'Frosted Jade'**
- H. 'Lime Fizz'**
- H. 'Loyalist'**
- H. 'Middle Ridge'**
- H. 'Midnight at the Oasis'**
- H. 'Minuteman'** - below:



- H. 'Moerheim'**
- H. 'Night Before Christmas'**
- H. 'Olympic Glacier'**
- H. 'Rock Island Line'**
- H. 'Snake Eyes'** - below:



- H. 'Spring Fling'**
- H. 'Tsugaru Komachi'**
- H. 'Vulcan'**
- H. 'Zager's White Edge'**