



## Golden Highlights

This month we kick off our new mini series of the 'best of' a specific characteristic by looking at what we consider to be the best gold and yellow varieties, and why...

### All that glitters is not gold

Many gold and yellow cultivars have been classified as such because they hold that colour for longer during the season. It is always difficult to decide how to classify leaf colour when seasonal and environmental conditions can have quite a marked effect on foliage colour. Also, every plant needs to have an element of green in the leaf at some point during the season in order to be able to convert sunlight into sugars to feed itself, so descriptions of leaf colour are relative to that fact.



If a cultivar is expected to change leaf colour during the season, we list it on the colouration page under the categories of albescent, lutescent and viridescent. These terms are explained in our December 2007 newsletter but essentially mean the leaf colour of the plant will get whiter, brighter or greener, respectively. For example, *H. 'Fire Island'*, opposite, is viridescent. It can be confusing but gardening is about experimentation and if a plant doesn't look as you would like it, try moving it into another position and see if you like it better.

With hostas, the general rule of thumb is that good shelter and shade bring out the best colour. However, there are some notable exceptions to this. *Hosta 'Sum and Substance'* is best grown in more light for the gold colour to sing out. In shady conditions the leaves will be greener, as the image below shows.



### Giant lovelies

*Hosta 'Sum and Substance'* is a great place for us to start listing our recommendations, but please remember you will need a large spot for this beautiful cultivar to really show off.

You can tame it in a container for a while, but it won't develop as many leaves or give you the 'wow' factor without routine re-potting, which can be a huge effort with this massive plant.

In sun the leaves turn bright yellow and have a lovely sheen but remember the plant will need access to plenty of moisture to avoid the leaves drying out.

Another excellent gold of similar height is *H. 'Sun Power'* - opposite. This variety also grows much better in the ground, but can be slow to get established. Growing it on in a container might be the best bet, especially if your soil is less than perfect.

*Hosta 'Sun Power'* has an elegant cascading habit and the elongated leaves turn orangey-gold as the season progresses.

Our collection plants have only recently begun to do this so don't expect an immature version to exhibit this colouring until it is very well established.

The third giant variety we would recommend is *H. 'Piedmont Gold'*. It has a similar leaf shape to *H. 'Sun Power'* but with more texture and lightly rippled leaf margins. If space is an issue in your garden, why not try a sport of this cultivar, *H. 'Jimmy Crack Corn'*, which is essentially a smaller version of the parent.



All three of our recommendations in this section are older varieties. There have been variations on these plants introduced since, but sometimes the oldies are the goodies!

### In Summary

It is difficult to isolate just a few varieties from so many, so please don't let us put you off any others you may be considering. As ever, we are happy to advise but this should get you started...

### Best for 'wow' impact:

*H. 'Sum and Substance'* - sheer size and presence

*H. 'Sun Power'* - elegance and mature colour

*H. 'Piedmont Gold'* - texture and substance

*H. 'Daybreak'* (above)- lower, spreading habit

*H. 'Sea Gulf Stream'* - best texture and substance

### Best for companion planting in a mixed border:

*H. 'Roxsanne'* - great colour all year

*H. 'Richland Gold'* - looks good in almost any scheme

*H. 'Hadspen Sapphire'* - spring gold and sheen



*H. 'Vanilla Cream'* (above)- excellent texture and leaf shape

*H. 'Little Aurora'* - a heart-shaped leaf and good texture

*H. 'Mrs Minky'* - one of the best habits for edging, lots of wavy-edged leaves

## Little rays of sunshine

At the opposite end of the spectrum are the small and miniature varieties, many of which are viridescence and will turn greener more readily due to their size. Below we recommend four varieties, which keep their yellow and gold throughout the season, providing they are not in too much of a bright spot:



**H. 'Dragon Tails'** is a slow starter but will soon reward you with a spiky mound of wavy-edged yellow leaves.



**H. 'Shiny Penny'** is the all-gold parent of **H. 'Cracker Crumbs'**. The leaves are neatly layered and have a sheen to them, which lights up a dark spot.



**H. 'Ground Sulphur'** is a cross between the two varieties on the left and it stays compact, making it a good companion plant for other miniature varieties.



**H. 'Yellow Boa'** is an excellent ground-cover variety, which stays small but spreads well. It produces masses of purple flowers in summer - very striking.

## Medium to large cultivars

Last month we previewed varieties to look out for in 2015, including **H. 'Cold Heart'**. This cultivar is stunning, especially when grown in a container and allowed to exhibit as a specimen. The leaves are rounder than those of **H. 'Jimmy Crack Corn'** but they both have rippled margins and prominent veins, which add to the architectural quality of the plants.

Two older cultivars, which we use often at spring shows are **H. 'Hadspen Sapphire'** and **H. 'Golden Oriole'**. Both are vibrantly gold with elegantly elongated leaves of excellence substance and sheen. Both also tend to turn limey as the season progresses, but neither lose their sheen, so are still eye-catching later on.

## Red stems

**Hosta 'Ophir'** is a great cultivar, which has a deceptively delicate-looking yellow leaf. We have yet to see it scorch but would recommend a sheltered spot for it. It is great for a container because the base of the petioles look like they have been dipped in sparkling red wine. Unlike **H. 'Fire Island'** this variety keeps its colour longer into the season. Our favourite yellow-leaved cultivar with red stems is **H. 'Tickle Me Pink'**. It grows really well and the red stems are clearly visible whether grown in a container, or in the ground. The red colour is also visible on the underside margins of the leaf tips.

## Texture



If you are after a much more rugose texture than **H. 'Sea Gulf Stream'** is one of the best - opposite. It also has highly rippled leaf margins and benefits from more shelter to avoid the leaves drying out and becoming brittle as a result.

There are quite a few larger varieties, which have excellent texture. We are particularly fond of **H. 'Doubloons'**, **H. 'City Lights'**, **H. 'Faith'** and **H. 'Zounds'**, which all have excellent colour and varying degrees of rugosity.

## Best for patio:

These varieties need warmth rather than direct sun to encourage the production of their fragrant flowers, usually during August.

**H. 'Fried Bananas'** - fragrant white flowers and very lush leaves

**H. 'Tortilla Chip'** - very similar to above but rare

## Best small/miniature:

**H. 'Dragon Tails'** - slow starter but worth the wait  
**H. 'Ground Sulphur'** - charming leaf shape and habit

**H. 'Shiny Penny'** - lovely sheen to the gold leaves

**H. 'Yellow Boa'** - lots of leaves and stunning purple flowers

## Best for containers:

**H. 'Cold Heart'** - elegant and layered with wonderful wavy leaf margins

**H. 'Fire Island'** - gold in spring turning limey. All new foliage emerges gold creating a layered effect on very red petioles

**H. 'Ophir'** - claret-red petioles below delicate yellow leaves, need to see the contrast for best effect

**H. 'Tickle Me Pink'** - small, with very red stems



**H. 'Gilt by Association'** (above) - elongated leaf shape and habit are hard to beat on this rare cultivar

**H. 'Jimmy Crack Corn'**, elongated, wavy-edged leaves are delightful in a container

**H. 'Corn Muffins'** - nearly round, rippled margined leaves.

**Next month:** We look at the best chartreuse to light green-leaved hostas...

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 39 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**.