



Lusciously rich and dark greens

This month we feature the best plain-leaved cultivars, with foliage ranging in colour from rich medium to dark green. Once again we focus on varieties we actually hold in our collection and have available for sale...

The perfect foils

Plain, dark green plants have a very useful role to play in the garden as the perfect background for more exotic planting. However, many of the cultivars we feature in this newsletter have a distinct character of their own and we feel they deserve a more prominent place in any garden planting scheme.

Starting with the giants, we love *H. 'Potomac Pride'*, which has rounded leaves of a sheen and substance we feel is hard to beat. We often use this cultivar in our flower show displays because it works so well in all sorts of schemes. It travels really well and looks good all season. The sheen becomes mirror-like when it rains, so if it were planted within the spray zone of a waterfall it would look especially stunning.

Hosta 'Empress Wu' is a more recent introduction and is the biggest cultivar to have been developed so far. We have only seen photos of this cultivar as a mature specimen and suspect it would grow larger in the right conditions. It is an early riser in the spring, which is just as well when you consider how much growth it will achieve during the season. This is one of the wonders of hostas and always amazes us year after year.

The third giant we would recommend for rich green is *H. 'Niagara Falls'* - opposite. The key reason it is on our list is its elegant habit. The leaves drop down from the top of the petioles allowing their beautiful form to be entirely visible, rather like a waterfall. We often sell this cultivar to people looking for a statement plant to go alongside a water feature. The prominent veins and rippled margins certainly enhance the architectural form of the plant - fabulous!

Coming down in size, one of the most interesting varieties dark green varieties is *'H. 'Stirfry'*. The leaves sit horizontally and fold downwards from the mid-rib. This habit is worth showing off in a container or as an isolated planting - the image below shows it used on the bend in a pathway on our first RHS Gold Medal display at Malvern in 2011:



Collection update

This spring we added 47 new varieties to our National Collection. Details of these cultivars will be added to the website later on this year, when we have had a chance to monitor their progress and capture images.

Over the years we have become more circumspect about the plants we add to our collection, looking more closely into the parentage before committing time and money to it.

All too often new cultivars are introduced to the market before being fully evaluated for garden-worthiness. However, There are branches of the hosta genus which consistently deliver good quality offspring. Indeed, we are sufficiently confident of the provenance of the following three cultivars, to offer them for sale this season:

1. *H. 'Autumn Frost'*



This is a sport of *H. 'First Frost'*, which is consistently variegated and vigorous. The new sport is a wider-margined improvement on the parent, but looks much the same as a young plant. So far they have emerged strongly, with well developed roots.

Medium varieties don't come much better than **H. 'Irish Luck'**. This cultivar is the glossiest we have come across to date. It has beautifully fragrant flowers so needs a warm spot to encourage flowering. Another early riser in the spring, it is such a rich deep green we think it outshines the ever popular **H. 'Devon Green'**.



Hosta 'Scallion Pancakes' is another intriguing Hosta worthy of attention. The satiny leaves exhibit a tinge of blue, which is beautifully enhanced by the colour of the flowers and their buds. The ovate leaves have prominent veins, which look quite dramatic, especially as the number of leaves increases as it matures. It is very similar to **H. 'Terpsichore'**.



2. **H. 'Catherine'**



To date, our experience of this cultivar leads us to the conclusion it is identical to **H. 'Touch of Class'**. It is from the Tardiana Group of hostas and is a sport of **H. 'Halcyon'**.

We have found most sports from this branch of the hosta genus to be very reliable but a few have not grown as we would expect. One such example is **H. 'Magic Island'**, a sport of **H. 'Catherine'**, which proved disappointing. Consequently we decided to wait on this cultivar a couple of years before taking the plunge.

In the small category, **H. 'Corkscrew'** (left) and **H. 'Tortifrons'** (right) are related, and very striking with their twisted narrow leaves. The former has leaves that are more twisted and slightly broader than those of the latter but they are both quite unusual:



3. **H. 'Snake Eyes'**



Both these varieties are great as accent plants when grown alongside other cultivars of similar stature. It is quite unusual to have such narrow leaves and they do look especially good alongside varieties with broader, fleshier leaves.

A number of years ago we had a few **H. 'Dixie Chick'** revert to plain green and gave them the name; **H. 'Waxing Lyrical'**. The plants grew extremely well and formed neat mounds of shiny dark green foliage. Recently this sport of **H. 'Dixie Chick'** was introduced to the market as **H. 'Crystal Dixie'**, so we re-named our plants and have found people like the name better.



Our three favourite dark green miniatures are **H. 'Yakushima Mizu'**, **H. 'Paradise Puppet'** and **H. 'Plug Nickel'**. The first two have dark green, very small leaves, and are popular for planting in sinks alongside more flamboyant miniatures.

They both grow quite vigorously for such tiny plants, forming dense mounds over time. **Hosta 'Plug Nickel'** is a sport of **H. 'Cracker Crumbs'** and grows very well. The leaves have prominent veins and the pale purple flowers sit very neatly just above the plant mound. It is a versatile plant, which would probably bonsai quite well due to its root structure.

This sport of **H. 'Striptease'** is a particularly attractive new cultivar, which really appeals to us, but might take a while to break through to the general public. We noticed that both **H. 'Kiwi Full Monty'** and **H. 'Hanky Panky'** took a while to register with people, producing a 'Marmite' effect, with people either loving or hating them.

Hosta 'Striptease' has delivered some of the most strikingly different variegations seen in modern cultivars - see our April 2008 newsletter on **H. 'Gold Standard'**, for more examples.

Next month: We feature the best dark green-leaved cultivars...

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**.