



The 'best of' blue variegated cultivars

This month we feature perhaps the second most popular leaf colour combination after green and white...

Blooming confusing

In our **June 2015 newsletter** we looked at why we should perhaps not refer to foliage as 'blue' because it is usually the result of a bloom on the leaf. The bloom refracts light in the ultra-violet end of the spectrum, making it look blue to the eye. However, we will stick to the term 'blue' because it is easier to do so.

When looking at blue variegated cultivars, most of the ones we feature in our list can be traced back to *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans', or '**H. 'Elegans'**', as most experts agree we should refer to this hybrid of *H. sieboldiana* and *H. 'Tokudama'*.

We featured this variety in our **30th issue of the newsletter**, so if you want to find out more, click on the link.

It seems that the intensity of the rich purply-blue leaves of this cultivar remains a constant among its offspring. A good example of this is *H. 'Extasy'*. Even though it is several generations removed from *H. 'Elegans'*, it has the same distinctive intensity of blue in its' margins. The Tardiana Group link (see more about this below) is clearly apparent in the flat, neat shape of the leaves.

In our experience, this is the strongest growing small cultivar of its type to date.



Hosta 'Extasy'

Sports of *Hosta* 'Elegans'

It will come as no surprise that our 'best of' list should feature some sports of *H. 'Elegans'*, such as *H. 'Barbara Ann'*, *H. 'Northern Exposure'* and *H. 'Temptation'*, which we have selected for their magnificent foliage. They are also reliable growers.



Hosta 'Dream Queen'

In our experience some *H. 'Elegans'* sports do not grow as vigorously, or true to character, as one might expect. *Hosta 'Golden Meadows'* is one we featured a couple of years ago, but have subsequently found has a tendency to revert.

Hosta 'Temptation' is a much more stable plant, and holding its variegation all season.

A particularly difficult one to grow is *H. 'Great Expectations'*. It is rather aptly named as a mature specimen does fill the gardener with great expectations of what the plant will do for them. Strangely, a sport of this particular cultivar does do extremely well for us, *H. 'Dream Queen'*, and so it is on the list.

In among our choices is another 'once removed' improvement on the original is *H. 'Olive Bailey Langdon'*. This variety is a sport of *H. 'Frances Williams'*, which comes from *H. 'Elegans'*. *Hosta 'Olive Bailey Langdon'* develops its margin colour during the season so is less prone to scorching, which is a particular problem with *H. 'Frances Williams'*, and fellow selection, *H. 'Samurai'*.

The Tardiana Group

The Tardiana Group of *Hosta* originate from the breeding work of Eric Smith, crossing *H. 'Tardiflora'* and *H. 'Elegans'*, which wouldn't perhaps be an obvious pairing. The results have provided a particularly rich source of modern cultivars.

Top twenty

Here is our list of the best blue variegated cultivars:



H. 'Aristocrat'
H. 'Barbara Ann'



H. 'Beckoning'
H. 'Dream Queen'
H. 'Earth Angel'
H. 'El Nino'
H. 'Extasy'



H. 'Great Escape'
H. 'Guardian Angel'
H. 'June'



H. 'Kiwi Full Monty'
H. 'Northern Exposure'

However, we are concerned about duplication because it seems growers are introducing varieties without consultation as to whether they already exist by another name. This is where holding a collection becomes useful, enabling us to compare the 'new' with the established cultivars.

This branch of the genus is possibly the most popular among gardeners. The neat shape of the leaves and their intense colours create a winning combination.

We still think *H. 'June'* and *H. 'El Nino'* are among the best. To these we have added *H. 'Great Escape'*, because, in our experience, it is reliably the best wide, white margined offspring of the group.

Hosta 'Punky' is a sport of *H. 'Blue Wedgwood'*, another of the Tardiana Group with beautifully shaped leaves. A slight wave to the leaf margin resembles a stetson hat.

If you like a narrower leaf, *H. 'Olympic Sunrise'* is a beautifully stable, with tough leaves.



Hosta 'Olympic Sunrise'
Photograph by Dave Harrison

A recent addition to the Tardiana Group offspring is *H. 'Stand By Me'*. This sport of *H. 'June'* has unusual variegation and a strange growing habit of seeming to explode from the centre. It is prone to throwing up premature flowers and flowers with inflorescent leaves. Whatever it decides to do each year, it is quite different from all the other sports we have seen to date, and, for that, we felt it deserved a place on our list.



Hosta 'Stand By Me'

Hosta 'Blue Angel'

Three of our choices for the 'best of' blue variegated cultivars originate from *H. 'Blue Angel'*. This variety draws its genetics from both *H. sieboldiana* and *H. montana*. It is likely the 'blue' comes from the former, whilst the *H. montana* influence is clearly indicated through the leaf shape, prominent veins and plant's habit of holding drooping leaves on upright stems.

As fans of the beauty of *H. 'Blue Angel'*, we derive great pleasure from its offspring: *H. 'Beckoning'*, *H. 'Guardian Angel'* and *H. 'Earth Angel'*. The latter keeps its colouring all season and has a similar prostrate habit to *H. Guardian Angel*, which has its best colour in spring. *Hosta 'Beckoning'*, on the other hand, emerges just like its parent and then develops its variegation as the season progresses.



Hosta 'Earth Angel'

One of the best characteristics of most 'blue' cultivars is the excellent substance of the leaves, which makes them much less susceptible to pest damage. Whether the bloom on the leaves is also a deterrent, is open to debate - they don't seem to be munched as readily, until the bloom fades in intensity, towards the latter part of the season. The blue bloom on the leaf can be damaged by over exposure to sunlight, which is why many 'blues' tend to fade to green during the season.

Next month: We bring news of how your monthly newsletters will be changing...

H. 'Olive Bailey Langdon'
H. 'Olympic Sunrise'
H. 'Punky'
H. 'Stand By Me'



H. 'Sugar Daddy'
H. 'Temptation'
H. 'Tokudama Flavocircinalis'
H. 'Toy Soldier'

Nursery update

The net cover for the new collection tunnel is now in place, and is currently being secured - this is the view from above:



We are delighted with the extra shade coverage and expect the plants in that tunnel will look fabulous next year.



A big thank you to the **Suffolk Group of Plant Heritage** for their contribution to the cost of the new cover.

Work has begun on the garden, with two beds dug and lots of tree and hedge trimming undertaken. It is exciting to finally get underway with this project. The aim of this area is to give visitors much more inspiration for growing *Hosta* in their own gardens.