



Becoming a hosta-holic

Our hosta collection began in 1976 with a gift from an American friend. At that time there were only a few different varieties commercially available so we quickly had all the ones we could source easily.

These days there are thousands of varieties available so this month we share the advice often requested by customers wishing to start collecting - where to start...

Categorising the genus

There are several ways to sub-divide the hosta genus into more manageable categories and this is illustrated well when looking at National Collections of the genus. National Collections of hosta tend to focus on a category such as; miniatures, tetraploids, large-leaved varieties, and so on.

Our collection spans the entire genus and so our collection choices are difficult to make. We have our own personal preferences, but need to balance these with the desire to continue to collect as broad a range of species and cultivars as we can. The following list is not exhaustive but it might help you select a starting point that suits your own area of interest in this diverse genus.

Colour, texture and habit of plant

Collecting hostas of one colour can work well especially if you combine different textures of leaves - there are some wonderfully rugose cultivars available that can be fun to play with in a single colour border. However, hostas look gorgeous together, whatever the colour combination, so it pays to inject some contrast to help the colours look more vibrant. For example, mixing blues and golds can make a stunning statement or perhaps picking out the dominant colour in a variegated hosta every now and then helps to add interest.

A recent trend for collecting varieties with red stems has been fed by breeders in the drive to create a red-leaf cultivar. Every year we see new cultivars that have more intensely red petioles and extended red colouring into the leaf veins. Some of these cultivars are stunning, especially *h.* 'Fire Island' (on the right) and its sport, *h.* 'Paradise Island', which has narrow green margins and a slightly pointed leaf.



Hostas have so many different habits, some are tall and graceful, whilst others grow close to the ground. It is fun creating a border of hostas cascading from the giants down to the small, front of border varieties. We choose to display in this way, with our exhibits at Hampton Court and Gardener's World. It is an effective way for us to highlight the range of plants available for sale. This approach causes much comment amongst visitors.

Patio perfume

Many fragrant varieties need more sun to flower, which makes them a good choice for patio containers.

Just make sure that they get sufficient water if they are in pots. Standing the pots in a deep saucer and keeping them topped up takes the guess work out of watering as the plant only takes what it needs.

Fragrance of flower

Several of our customers have concentrated on fragrant varieties - these are listed under [fragrant varieties](#) on our website. These varieties vary in size, but we currently only have one miniature cultivar with fragrant flowers, *h.* 'Daisy Doolittle'. Unfortunately, this cultivar seems slow to take hold so it might be a while before it becomes more easily available and we won't sell it until we are happy that it is garden worthy.

Size of plant

This is an important consideration for most gardeners as garden space can be limited. However, we do have a few customers with very extensive collections in fairly average-sized gardens. We also have customers who only collect the miniatures, as all they have is a balcony or small courtyard. A mix of sizes highlight the huge spectrum - in much the same way as our cascade exhibits do at shows. We do advise customers not to get too bogged down with exact sizings as hosta growth depends largely upon the environment in which they grow. It is better to select a variety you like, even if it might eventually grow to be too large for the space you have in mind. Remember you can always dig up and divide plants to reduce the size every few years or planting in a pot sunk into the ground will also restrict root growth.

Spring divisions from our collection

As the temperature in the tunnels warms up we have been busy dividing. The following cultivars have just been added to our availability list:



H. 'Abiqua Recluse'



H. 'Aksarben'



H. 'Anne'



H. 'Blue Seer'



H. 'Cavalcade'



Our 2008 Hampton Court Plant Mall exhibit

The recent explosion on the number of miniature varieties has resulted in a large number of people focusing their collections on the smallest hostas. On the other end of the scale we know quite a few collectors who specialise in large/giant leaved varieties and this year there are some fabulous cultivars coming on to the market. Apparently *h. 'Jurassic Park'* doesn't suffer any pest problems - read this [entertaining description](#) and you will understand why.

Breeder of cultivars

Over recent years a number of breeders have become very active in the development of new cultivars and they often include the name of their nursery or location as a suffix to the names of their introductions, such as Mary Chastain's 'Lakeside' series, Marco Fransen's 'Paradise' series and Barry Sligh's 'Kiwi' series. These particular breeders produce a wide range of cultivar types so your collection would be varied. Choosing a breeder who uses a limited range of varieties as parents could narrow the scope of the collection, for example you could choose to focus on Eric Smith, perhaps our most famous UK breeder who produced the Tardiana Group of hostas. Most of the Tardiana Group are plain leaved blue and gold cultivars that are distinctively uniform in shape. However, the Tardiana Group of hostas has been responsible for some of the most popular and striking cultivars to come to the market in the last few decades. *H. 'Halcyon'* is possibly the most famous of the Tardiana Group and has been used extensively to produce some of the most striking cultivars over recent years - take a look at the [July 2007](#) newsletter for more information. Extending your collection into new generations of cultivars can be very rewarding.

We will be featuring the Tardiana Group in our display at the Malvern Spring Show as part of the 'Celebrating British Horticulture' section in the Floral Marquee.

Parentage of plant

This is a really good way to extend what you like about a specific plant into a collection of similar types. Last year we created a display of cultivars originating from *h. 'Tokudama'*. This medium-sized but slow growing hosta is a parent to a quite wide range of cultivars and we featured a couple of generations of them in the [June 2008](#) newsletter.

H. 'Tokudama', and its offspring, would be a good choice for an average-sized garden border as many of the cultivars are small-medium in size and slow growing. However, you cannot predict that a cultivar will exhibit the size characteristics of a parent and a good example of this is *h. 'Sum and Substance'*, which has been used extensively by breeders to create a wide range of new varieties that cross the entire spectrum of hosta sizes - see the [May 2008](#) newsletter for more information.

Finally, perhaps the best way to start a collection if you like all hostas, rather than a specific category, is to begin with our top ten of hosta 'must haves' featured in the [March 2008](#) newsletter. This list contains mainly older varieties but they stand the test of time and would give you a sound base on which to grow your very own collection - so what's stopping you?

PSST... don't forget to treat your hostas to some early pest control

The weather is warming up now so slugs are starting to break their hibernation - visit our [FAQ page](#) for more details.

Next month: Continuing our parentage series, we look at *h. 'Dorothy Benedict'*



H. clausa



H. 'Fringe Benefit'



H. 'Golden Medallion'



H. 'Hadspen Heron'



H. 'Kifukurin Ubatake'



H. 'Mountain Snow'



H. 'Regal Rhubarb'



H. 'Sea Lotus Leaf'



H. 'See Saw'

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 30 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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