



## *Small wonders*

It may surprise you to know that there are a lot of small-medium size cultivars that are great growers. We end up with so much stock of them because they are exceptional growers and they divide well. As a consequence, we thought we would promote them more this year ...



## *The role of these smaller cultivars*

I would go so far as to say most small hosta cultivars are happy grown in containers, but many get overlooked as they seldom show their promise until more mature. However, they tend to be faster growers, especially if they have larger leaves, so you do not have to wait as long for maturity.

Now we no longer exhibit at flower shows, our small cultivars are less noticed. I used to take a lot of small cultivars to shows because although their stature is shorter, they can have a decent spread and look especially good when overflowing a beautiful container. In my opinion they are the most versatile part of the genus as they can be used in so many ways, some of which I explore in the side column.

### *Hosta 'Amy Elizabeth'*

This beautiful cultivar has quite subtle colouring in spring but by late summer the margins deepen and second flush leaves look noticeably variegated. It is the top end of small at around 13" tall by 35" in diameter, the leaves are 5" x 4" with a slightly wavy margin. The delicate blue-green margins help define the leaves as they layer in a cascading form. As the photo below shows, this cultivar can be very successfully

## *Small but versatile*

The photo above shows an array of small cultivars underneath larger hostas at Gardeners' World Live in 2013.

I had decided to focus on a more theatrical set of displays that year to show how you can use smaller cultivars to great effect.

At the same show I created a mossy mound of small cultivars along one the perimeter curves of my island stand.

As you can see, alternating plain leaves with variegated breaks up the display and they complement each other well. You can imagine a similar effect just by standing pots in a curve:



miniaturised completely in context with the mature version in the background. Even the flower spikes are shorter:



This is another sign of a great grower, as there needs to be a strong root system to withstand the techniques of miniturisation.



### Hosta 'Abby'

*Hosta 'Amy Elizabeth'* is a sport of *H. 'Abby'*, see photo below, which has approximately the same dimensions but the variegation is in reverse. This makes these two natural companion plants:



These two cultivars are both related to the [H. 'Gold Drop'](#) part of the genus and have a decent spread, so they are great for ground cover, perhaps underneath other planting as long as they are given sufficient water so they do not struggle to develop.



You could combine spiky-leaves cultivars with round leaves, textured with flat, and even put other plantings such as ferns among such an arrangement to line a pathway, or set of steps. In the photo below I edge a meandering path in the same display with small cultivars, as well as using some as specimens in pots:



### *Hosta 'Abiqua Trumpet'*

A personal favourite of mine with its textured, spoon-shaped leaves held on long petioles. The depth of colour in the 4" x 3" blue-green leaves is wonderful and makes it a great companion for other planting. The 10" x 30" mound is open in habit but as the plant matures it gets more densely packed so if you like the open habit then divide the plant periodically.



Smaller cultivars can initially be grown on in smaller pots and containers. Indeed, they are great when used in hanging baskets but as they generally grown quite quickly you will need to move them up a pot size, or divide quite regularly.

### *Hosta 'Harry van Trier'*

This vigorous grower does equally well in the ground as in a container. Its 10" x 15" mound is densely packed with deeply folded, dark green, satiny leaves, which twist at the tips. It produces a prodigious amount of purple flowers and looks stunning as a foil for other small hostas.



We planted a 'Harry' in one of the beds in the south field a few years ago and it did superbly, producing a lot of divisions when I lifted it.

### *Hosta 'Forest Shadows'*

I adore this cultivar, especially as it often goes under the radar of other, more vibrant varieties with its subtle colouring. This cultivar grows about the same size as *H. 'Harry van Trier'*, above, and has blue-green



Although regular dividing may sound like a pain, look at it as plants for free, and the combinations are endless. It's a great opportunity to get creative and if you would like to include some more trailing foliage, how about heuchera or ivy to complement the hosta?



margins that streak to the midrib of the green leaves. It is also part of the *H.* 'Gold Drop' branch of hostas, being closer in size to this variety than the first two hostas featured.



### [Hosta 'Sherborne Swift'](#)

Last, but certainly not least, is this brilliant grower, which has one of the longest seasons in the hosta world. Part of the Tardiana Group, I don't think there were many shows I didn't use it at because it packs such a punch from the first show to the last every year.

It is the smallest of the plants featured this month at 8" x 13". The 5" x 3" blue leaves hold onto their bloom well into the season, especially if kept out of direct sunlight. The arrow-shaped leaves contrast well with any hosta you care to position it alongside.



I hope you try some of these cultivars, they are well worth considering.

Speak soon,

Team Mickfield Hostas

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During my years of exhibiting I was always on the look-out for interesting or unusual containers for use in exhibiting, here I used a chimney pot and coal scuttle to show off [H.](#) ['Praying Hands'](#), and its smaller scale sport [H.](#) ['Hands Up'](#) at Gardeners' World in 2016. If you click on the image below, you can watch a video of the display, which also features the miniaturisation of *H.* 'Amy Elizabeth' as mentioned at the start of this newsletter:



I wouldn't advise the long-term use of such narrow containers for most hostas but these two have very narrow root systems, so can withstand that confinement for a while.

If you enjoyed the video, don't forget to visit our [video clip page](#) and you will see many of the varieties I am featuring in this 'great growers' series.