

Planning your hosta purchases can be a little tricky especially when your eyes may tend to stray to the more eye-catching varieties.

The majority of hosta cultivars hold their characteristics throughout the season so you know what to expect. But there are quite a few varieties that change colouring across the season and can look quite different in the autumn compared to the spring. This month we look at varieties that change colouration throughout the season...

The value of variety

Hosta cultivars that change colour throughout the season can be particularly valuable in a well established garden where other plants are competing for attention. For example, spring usually sees lots of bright, fresh growth so a hosta variety that starts out mid green and turns lighter and brighter could act as a background plant in the spring and then emerge as a striking accent plant as its colour brightens, whilst other planting matures into its summer colours.

To help you decide which varieties would suit your own requirements we have created a [new 'colouration' listing page](#), which highlights those varieties that exhibit colour changes. Many cultivars are variegated, which means we also need to note what happens to the centre and edges (margins) of the leaves. Therefore, if only one element of the leaf changes across the season we have categorised it as either the centre or margin exhibiting the colouration change.

Albescence: when the leaves turn whiter/white across the season

The creation of a stable white leaved hosta seems to have become the horticultural equivalent of finding the 'holy grail'. The cultivar *h. 'White Feather'* has been widely trumpeted as the first white hosta but this claim needs to be examined because, in truth, the white should fade to green so the plant can make sufficient chlorophyll to survive. Until such a cultivar becomes available perhaps the next best thing is to grow a plant that turns whiter as the season progresses.

We currently have only four varieties where the whole leaf turns white across the season but we do have quite a few varieties where just the centre or margin turns white.

Whole leaf becomes albescent



h. 'Janet'

The leaves turn parchment white by mid summer.

Centre becomes albescent



h. 'Fireworks'

The leaf centres become whiter as the leaves mature through the season.

Margin becomes albescent



h. 'First Frost'

The leaves emerge with yellow margins that turn pure white.

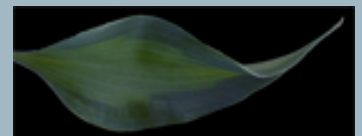
Unusual colouration

The classic cultivar that exhibits different colouration depending upon its growing conditions is *h. 'June'*, which is why we recommend it as an excellent beginners plant. It encourages gardeners to think about the effect growing conditions can have on a plant. Other modern classics with distinctive colouration include:



h. 'Eye Catcher'

The brightest color in the spring garden. The leaves will turn green unless the plant is grown in the sun.



h. 'Olympic Sunrise'

As the season progresses this stunning cultivar exhibits a changing centre

Lutescence: when the leaves become lighter and brighter across the season

Lutescence describes the characteristic of lightening despite environmental conditions that can also have a similar effect. Environmental lightening often has the drawback of leaf scorching or the development of translucence that effectively ages the plant prematurely. Truly lutescent plants brighten shady, dark corners of the garden as general foliage matures into the deeper, greener shades of late summer and autumn.

Whole leaf becomes lutescent



h. 'Roxsanne'

The leaves emerge light green and change to a vibrant yellow shade.

Centre becomes lutescent



h. 'Kathryn Lewis'

The leaves emerge blue-green and change to gold leaves with a blue-green edge.

Margin becomes lutescent



h. 'Independence'

The leaves emerge with a pale yellow margin, which lightens as the season progresses.

Viridescence: when the leaves turn green across the season

Viridescence is quite common and can be a particularly useful characteristic in a planting scheme that focuses on late summer and autumn colour when many other garden plants are at their most showy.

Whole leaf becomes viridescent



h. 'Fire Island'

New leaves emerge bright yellow-green and turn a chartreuse green through the season.

Centre becomes viridescent



h. 'War Paint'

The leaves emerge with a striking variegation, which gradually fades as the center darkens to a light green.

Margin becomes viridescent

Unfortunately we don't yet have a leaf image for *h. 'Golden Meadows'* so take a look at the [Hosta Library images](#) for now. These large yellow-green leaves emerge with a blue margin that gradually turns dark green. More details on this variety will be available next month.

To sum up, changing colouration can add an exciting dimension to any planting scheme and can be used to great effect.

PSST . . . bear in mind lighting conditions at shows

During the season we try to highlight some of these special varieties in our show exhibits but our efforts are often thwarted by poor exhibition lighting. Nothing beats seeing hostas in their natural environment, which is the main reason why we encourage customers to visit us at the nursery.

Next month: We list our sale plants for 2008 and new additions to the collection

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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colour from green through yellow to creamy white.



h. 'Stained Glass'

The leaves improve in colouration and texture as the season progresses culminating in a spectacular display in autumn - this variety also has very fragrant flowers.



h. 'Touch of Class'

This cultivar is a wonderful addition to any garden scheme with fabulous smokey leaves that become glossier towards autumn - exaggerating the leaf colours.

What's coming along...

We have featured varieties that we will have for sale in 2008 but we are always adding to our collection. Two very interesting cultivars have just been added to our collection: *h. 'Flip Flop'* and *h. 'Collector's Banner'*. These two cultivars have leaves that start out with a green centre and yellow margin and during the season this colouration switches to a yellow centre with a green margin - fascinating! More details to follow...