

December 2022



Using hostas to stretch your gardening budget

When it comes to hostas, some of the best growers are also the cheapest because they reproduce brilliantly and are reliable. Don't overlook the established varieties – they have so much to offer.

We begin this month hearing from Lenore...

Greetings hosta gardeners

Winter approaches, and our hostas are going dormant after a lovely growing season. Each year we add new hosta introductions, which are lovely. But I'd like to tell you about some old, reliable beauties we've had for many years. It's common here in the U.S. to see these old hosta varieties bordering driveways and walkways, circling trees, and clustering along the sides of houses in various neighborhoods. The current homeowners inherit the hostas, and may not know their names. They tell me they have "the green ones" or "the green and white ones." But they treasure them, especially in light of hostas' increased popularity here in the U.S.

Four of these old varieties came with us 28 years ago when we moved from Illinois, in the U.S. midwest, to Maine, in the northeast. Hastily dug and potted on moving day, they rode on the floor of our car during the 1,400 mile (2,253 Kilometer) trip. These hostas, valued gifts from a dear friend and neighbor, were 'Undulata,' 'Undulata Albomarginata,' *hosta lancifolia*, (see photo below, edging a walkway) and 'Apple Green.'



For a year they lived in the yard of a rented house here in Orono, Maine, then moved with us to our current home on the shore of the Stillwater River. These four hostas became the bones of our new garden and continue to serve us well. Over the years I have

The time v money trade-off

I often hear people exclaim that they will be dead before their plant will mature.

Unfortunately, the cost of buying a mature plant can seldom be justified unless your pockets are extremely deep, so you need to balance your expectation to your budget. Besides, I would always caution buying mature plants as transplanting them can result in a less than optimum performance for a couple of years. Why not watch the pennies and allow a plant to grow naturally into its environment? Try not to think about your garden in terms of the 'finished' article. All gardens evolve and the process of growing is the essence of gardening, so why rush it?

It's not a 'size' thing!

We price our plants according to their rarity and what it costs us to get them to the point of sale, rather than what size they will be when mature.

The point of sale for us is when we would be confident that the purchaser could take them home

divided and transplanted them many times. They've filled in difficult spaces, acted as groundcovers and borders, and have generally enhanced our garden design. Many divisions now grow in friends' gardens as well.

Over time we've acquired more hosta cultivars, more than 300 at last count. But those four old standbys are still with us, still performing important functions in the garden. Last year we had to move an entire garden bed to accommodate utilities. Hostas 'Undulata' and 'Undulata Albomarginata' were growing in that bed. It was late November, when the hosta leaves were gone and the plants were going dormant. I dug them up, dividing the roots as I replanted them into the only available space, a rather dark corner where I feared nothing would grow. This spring they appeared, bright and beautiful, lighting up that formerly dark space.

Other hostas have become reliable classics over the years as well. Giants 'Elegans' and 'Frances Williams' fill in large spaces. They make impressive statements, both in-ground and in pots, and form backdrops for the newer cultivars. And we've come to rely on many more, older standbys, including 'June,' 'Guacamole,' 'Chinese Sunrise,' 'Blue Cadet,' and others.

I believe all hostas are beautiful. Some are new and exciting, and some are show-stoppers. But the old standbys deserve praise for being true work horses in the garden. If you're looking to grow hostas on a budget, or want fast-growing, reliable cultivars, your nursery owner can guide you in your choices.

All the best, Lenore



H. 'Chinese Sunrise' and others providing a base for Hakonechloa "waterfall" on back hillside.

Creating a 'wow' on a budget

I often speak to people throughout the year about their hosta stories and so many tell me about how they came to have them,

and plant them into the garden or container without any additional 'growing on'.

Most hostas will get going fairly quickly but some take more care to get them to the point at which we would consider them transplantable. Quite a few of the more variegated miniature varieties fall into this bracket, and other cultivars with a lot of variegation, other than green, in the leaf. As a result we charge more for these varieties to allow for additional growing processes and the time this takes.

A thoroughly excellent miniature is [H. 'Red Cadet'](#), which has quite large leaves for the size of plant:



It grows really well and is especially good in a hanging basket where you can see the red petioles:



Are hostas expensive?

I have often heard hostas being described as expensive, but they are no more expensive than many other plants, and not many other plants are as versatile or hard working.

The vast majority of the plants we

and how they have treasured them over the years. Because they are so easy to divide and transplant, you can continue to use them to create new plantings and experiment with other plants to great effect, such as Lenore's Hakonechloa waterfall in the photo above.

When you buy a plant, investigate its potential as a source plant for future division. Think about the size of the mature plant and whether it has a compact or spreading form. Lenore has used a single original *H. lancifolia* sub-divided over several years to create a walkway edging. However, this particular species will naturally grow in a spreading fashion so can cover an area more quickly.

Show stopping features

Hostas make such great foils for other planting and repeating a plant to create a sweep of colour is a great way to draw the eye. You can also repeat individual plants in order to draw a design together, as they can act as focal points or simply to continue a colour scheme or break up an area using texture. If you are prepared to wait for your plants to mature sufficiently to divide you will be rewarded for your patience. Not only will you be able to create a show stopping vista, it will have been achieved at very little additional cost.

Gathering inspiration

I found a trip to Dunvegan Castle on Skye, very inspiring but not just for the castle. The gardens were lovely and they had used lots of hostas to great effect. I especially liked the scene below:



have for sale fall within the £10 bracket. For a plant that will multiply over time, give you at least 6 months of wonderful colour and foliage every year, be easy to grow and give so much pleasure. What can you buy for £10 these days that will give such longevity?

Longer season plants

Hostas already give around six months of season every year but some can emerge earlier and last longer. Plants from the Tardiana Group, and their offspring, are great examples. There are so many new introductions from this branch of the genus every year but arguably you would be better off selecting a cultivar as close to the original group as possible for the best performance.



[Hosta 'June'](#), despite all the cultivars that have been bred from this plant, it is still up there for the best colour and balance of colour. The fact that it can look very different if planted in more/less light, makes it very versatile in any garden.



[Hosta 'Sherborne Swift'](#) is the only variety I use all season, from the

You do not need to slavishly try to recreate the effect, simply break it down into elements and select plants that will suit your interpretation of it.

The photo below (taken at Fuller's Mill) shows how a blue hosta really complements the delicate white flowers of an Astartia, and both plants nestle beautifully under an arching fern a striking yet subtle combination of textures and colours;



Take inspiration from anywhere you find it and if you do not know where to start I suggest you visit gardens local to your own in order to gather ideas of plants which are thriving in similar conditions. Many villages hold open garden events and [The National Garden Scheme](#) is a top way to gain access to hundreds of inspiring gardens across the UK.

Work with what you have

Removing visual clutter is also a great way to create a crisp vista. Remember all plants can do with some cutting back over time, which will help them 'exhibit' better among other plantings. Less can definitely be more as I used to find when exhibiting at shows. Coordinating containers and limiting the colour palette can create a 'wow' factor without the need for further expense other than some exterior paint for non-glazed and plastic pots. Removing a confusion of colour and/or foliage allows the eye to follow where you want it to go.

I hope this newsletter has given you some food for thought. Next month I will return to the hosta identification series with a look at *H. 'Fortunei'* types.

In the meantime,

Season's Greetings from all at Mickfield Hostas

earliest plant fails to the last. It is a constant performer throughout the entire season and can tolerate more warmth and light without losing its bloom making it a small but perfectly formed anchor in any planting scheme.

Cheaper alternatives

There is a lot of similarity in the hosta world, and many newly introduced cultivars are tweaked versions of existing varieties.

One particular colour combination that attracts a lot of interest is a gold leaf with a crisp green margin.

This combination is great for brightening up a dark corner or linking other planting but if you are looking for a plant to fill a space at the back of a border, are you ever going to be close enough to appreciate the improved qualities of a newer cultivar over a solid, reliable old favourite such as

[*H. 'Gold Standard'*](#)?



Multiply your buying power

As a final thought, why not join forces with other gardeners and share divisions, swap plants and learn from others' experiences. The best way to do this is to join a local gardening club. The modest fees will open up a world of valuable knowledge, fun and friendship.