



Hosta names

This month we answer a question we often hear posed while we are out and about at shows: "who thinks up the names for these plants?"

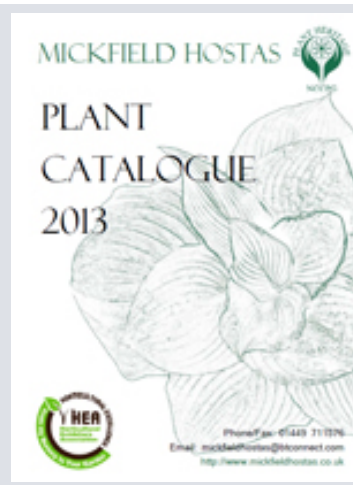
The short answer is, the breeder, which gets us off the hook nicely, when the names can mean something quite different in the UK, than they do in their country of origin...

2013 Plant Lists

Before we kick off with the subject of hosta names, we have just published our online Plant List for 2013. The catalogue is available for **download here**, (or click on the image opposite) together with instructions on how to print it out, if a hard copy is required.

As ever, we will be sending out copies of our catalogue to everyone who ordered from us in 2012, and many regular customers, who prefer to have a paper copy.

We have also updated our **Search facility** to list only those varieties we have available for sale. This is a great place to start your hunt if you know what leaf colour (or colour variegation) you want...



Analysing names

This is a great way to become more familiar with the hosta genus, and find out about some of the more famous hosta hybridisers.

Although it is probably true that the majority of cultivars currently in existence, were the happy result of mutations through the process of tissue culture, someone has to 'discover' them, and, hopefully, do the research required to establish whether the cultivar already exists, before registering them as identifiably different. The breeder then has the task of naming it.



H. 'Blue Mouse Ears'

There are established conventions for how plant names are quoted within the scientific community. However, there are no set conventions for the actual naming of plants. This very much follows the personal preferences of the breeder, or botanist, responsible for its introduction.

Some names describe the plant beautifully, without the need to go into further detail. Many names are a combination of an adjective with a noun, which describes notable characteristics, for example, *h. 'Blue Mouse Ears'* opposite.

Species names

The species we hold in our collection illustrates the range of names used:

h. aequinoctiantha: the late flowering hosta

h. alismifolia: named as a water-plantain

h. capitata: dense, ball-shaped clusters of flowers

h. clausa: closed flower buds

h. fluctuans: describing wavy leaves

h. gracillima: long, slender flowers

h. hypoleuca: white backed leaves

h. jonesii: named after Dr Samuel Jones

h. kikutii: named after the botanist Akio Kikuchi

h. laevigata: from *laevigatus*, meaning polished leaves

h. lancifolia: lance-shaped leaves

h. longipes: the hosta growing among rocks

Do names matter?

Names can be very important when looking into the parentage of plants, especially if some effort has been made to link them to their origins.

The ultimate parentage of all hosta cultivars are the species, which have been named for particular characteristics, place of origin in the wild, and discoverer. To illustrate this, we have listed all the species we hold in our collection in the side column, together with the reason for their names.

When we are asked about hosta names, we quote the breeder, as declared in the **Hosta Registry**. This is always our first port of call for information about any hosta.

It is the most comprehensive attempt at creating a registration system for new cultivars, and is something we should all support. However, not every breeder chooses to register all their introductions. This can lead to problems establishing whether a new cultivar might already exist elsewhere, under another name.

Names can be changed or refined over time, sometimes on a number of occasions, and is an ongoing complication with hostas.

Historical name changes

It is interesting to look at how names have changed historically, to reflect the latest scientific thinking and developments. Hostas have previously been classified as *funkia* and plantain lilies. Does this explain the linkage to *Hemerocallis* in our own British Hosta and Hemerocalis Society?

Translating names into English also presents a few problems, not least because of naming conventions in the countries of origin. Collectors were not always able to spend as much time in the field analysing minute differences, whilst on expeditions, so their observations may not have been as accurate as modern scientific research demands. Botanists have had their work cut out, over subsequent years, trying to differentiate the species and cultivars discovered by their predecessors. The continued debate over the true origins, parentage and naming of hosta is one of the many aspects of the genus we enjoy investigating, and reporting on. We often base our Plant Heritage displays on the subject.

Another consequence of the work carried out to identify plants definitively, is that some end up having multiple names associated with them. If you then add to that the modern curse of incorrectly labelled plants at nurseries and shows, more confusion can occur. Plant names are important, why do some varieties sell, whilst others don't, despite looking so very similar? Our experience of selling hostas is that people often go for names they like, or have an affinity with, in preference to the actual characteristics produced. This sometimes seems a little strange, but is as good a pace to start as any.



H. 'Hirao Supreme'

Also known as: 'Rudolph 2', 'Hirao T66-02' and 'Japanese Tet #2'!

We have already done newsletters about Eric Smith's **Tardiana Group** and the **'Northern' series** of hostas introduced from Walters Gardens in Michigan, USA. So we plan to continue this theme in future newsletters, looking at other hosta 'series'. We will kick off with the largest, the Lakeside series, next month.

Next month: We feature the Lakeside series of the genus...

h. minor: the small hosta

h. montana: the hosta growing on mountainsides

h. nakaiana: the hairpin hosta, describing the flower bud

h. nigrescens: the black (very dark green) hosta

h. okamotoi: named after it's discoverer Mr Okamoto

h. pachyscapa: thick flower scapes

h. plantaginea: named after the plantain

h. pycnophylla: densely packed leaves

h. rectifolia: upright, erect habit

h. rupifraga: growing in rocky clefts

h. sieboldii and

h. sieboldiana: named for Philipp Franz von Siebold

h. takahashii: named after Shihizo Takahashi

h. tardiva: from *tardus*, meaning late flowering

h. tibae: named after Tsunesaburo Chiba

h. tsushimensis: the hosta from Tsushima

h. ventricosa: describing the bell-shaped flowers

h. venusta: from *venustus*, meaning beauty

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 38 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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