



## Happy New Year

We kick off our fourth year of these newsletters with another look at the issue of species versus cultivars.

There is still disagreement among eminent authorities over which varieties can be classified as species. As ever, we need to steer a pragmatic path through the debate to ensure we do not add to the confusion...

## Previously...

Back in March 2007, the American Hosta Society (AHS), listed only 24 accepted botanical species - see the **March 2007 newsletter** for more details.

Since then the debate over which varieties should be classed as species has continued. Over the years, we have referred to *The Genus Hosta* by George Schmid, *The Hosta Handbook* and *The Hostapedia* by Mark Zilis, and AHS publications, to keep our records up to date and accurately record what the experts agree are species, and those which should be reduced to cultivar status.

In this newsletter we look at the top-level nomenclature and will return to the subject of disputed species forms in subsequent issues. To date the following varieties are recognised by all our chosen experts as genuine species:

*aequinoctiantha*, *alismifolia*, *atropurpurea*, *calliantha*, *capitata*, *cathayana*, *clausa*, *clavata*, *densa*, *fluctuans*, *gracillima*, *hypoleuca*, *jonesii*, *kikutii*, *kiyosumiensis*, *laevigata*, *longipes*, *longissima*, *minor*, *montana*, *nakaiana*, *nigrescens*, *pachyscapa*, *plantaginea*, *pulchella*, *pycnophylla*, *rectifolia*, *rupifraga*, *shikokiana*, *sieboldiana*, *sieboldii*, *tardiva*, *tibae*, *tsushimensis*, *ventricosa*, *venusta*, *yingeri*.

Opinions are divided on the rest, as we have highlighted in the table below. The asterisk marked cells indicate agreement with species status:

Name	Schmid The Genus Hosta	AHS The Tan Book	Zilis The Hostapedia	RHS Plant Finder
<i>crassifolia</i>	*	*	<i>lancifolia</i>	*
<i>crispula</i>	'Crispula'	'Crispula'	'Crispula'	*
<i>decorata</i>	'Decorata'	'Decorata'	'Decorata'	*
<i>elata</i>	'Elata'	'Elata'	'Elata'	*
<i>fortunei</i>	'Fortunei'	'Fortunei'	'Fortunei'	*
<i>helonioides</i>	'Helonioides'	'Helonioides'	'Helonioides'	*
<i>hippeastrum</i>	'Hippeastrum'	'Hippeastrum'	'Hippeastrum'	*
<i>ibukiensis</i>	*	*	*	Not listed
<i>lancifolia</i>	'Lancifolia'	'Lancifolia'	*	*
<i>okamotoi</i>	*	*	*	Not listed
<i>rohdeifolia</i>	'Rohdeifolia'	'Rohdeifolia'	*	*
<i>takahashii</i>	*	*	*	'Gosan' ( <i>takahashii</i> )
<i>takiensis</i>	*	*	*	Not listed
<i>tardiflora</i>	'Tardiflora'	'Tardiflora'	'Tardiflora'	*
<i>tokudama</i>	'Tokudama'	'Tokudama'	'Tokudama'	*
<i>undulata</i>	'Undulata'	'Undulata'	'Undulata'	*

## Species in our collection

We are very keen to have examples of all the listed species in our collection, and we are gradually achieving this.

Although some hosta species look very similar, they each possess very specific traits that breeders can select for improvement in their programmes.

The following is a list of agreed species we hold in our collection, together with some of their more desirable breeding characteristics:

***h. aequinoctiantha*** - flowering habit and smooth foliage

***h. alismifolia***- leaf shape and depth of colour

***h. capitata***- rippled leaves and purple flowers

***h. clausa***- purple speckled petioles and rich purple flowers

***h. fluctuans***- leaf colour and structure

***h. gracillima***- reddish purple speckled petioles and size of plant mound

***h. hypoleuca***- white bloom to leaf underside and reliability for breeding

***h. jonesii*** - shiny leaves

***h. kikutii*** - late and prolific flowering

### Where does that leave us?

As we are UK based, hold a National Plant Collection, and exhibit at the major Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Flower Shows, we need to label our specimen plants according to the RHS Plant Finder, which is the reference for botanical naming conventions in the UK. This requirement throws the debate over species versus cultivar status into sharp relief for us. As regular readers of this newsletter will be aware, we do not consider ourselves botanical experts and rather than join this debate, we simply report on it. We take note of expert opinion and try to steer our customers through the confusion.

In the future we will be using the RHS Plant Finder nomenclature for all our labelling for shows and associated activities. For all other purposes we will use a combination of sources to determine which we will refer to as species and cultivars. Over the next couple of months our website will be updated with this information - where there is disagreement we will highlight it on the individual variety pages.

### Why does all this matter?

Naming conventions are important, especially for a genus that regularly produces so many new varieties, which cannot be accurately identified as belonging to a specific branch of the genus. Being able to identify the species groups helps to identify the potential parentage of a new variety, which helps us understand more of the plants potential growth characteristics and growing requirements. It is all part of the educational process of understanding the genus and is something we are more focused on in our work with Plant Heritage.

Last year we staged our first educational display in the Plant Heritage Marquee at Hampton Court Flower Show. We featured *h. sieboldiana* and highlighted how a sport of this species has been incorrectly, but widely accepted, as the Western form of the species - it was an interesting illustration of the way this branch of the genus has developed subsequently. The photo below shows part of the display - more details can be found in the [July 2010 newsletter](#).



We consider it our responsibility to keep up to date with developments and we work hard to do this, communicating important updates and changes with you. This is the time of year when we are able to do this, and you can expect lots of revised and new information to appear on the website over the coming months.

**Next month:** [We take a closer look at the disputed species...](#)

- [h. laevigata](#)- fast growing with narrow purple flowers
- [h. lancifolia](#)- fast growing, late flowering and symmetrical habit
- [h. longipes](#)- variety of plant forms means lots of scope for breeders
- [h. minor](#)- size of plant, purple flowers
- [h. montana](#) - leaf shape and substance
- [h. nakaiana](#)- tight clusters of flowers, size of plant and prolific seed pods
- [h. nigrescens](#) - plant stature and habit, leaf colour and substance
- [h. okamotoi](#)- shiny leaves, red petioles
- [h. pachyscapa](#) - leaf shape and texture
- [h. plantaginea](#)- fragrant, white trumpet flowers
- [h. pycnophylla](#)- rippled leaves with white bloomed undersides
- [h. rectifolia](#) - prolific production of seed pods
- [h. rupifraga](#)- shiny, waxy foliage
- [h. sieboldiana](#) - size of plant, habit and leaf characteristics
- [h. sieboldii](#)- size of plant and leaf shape
- [h. takahashii](#)- shiny, wavy leaves and purple flowers
- [h. tardiva](#)- leaf shape and colour
- [h. tsushimensis](#) - diversity of foliage and flower
- [h. ventricosa](#)- natural tetraploid, bell-shaped flowers, the only species that can be accurately reproduced from seed
- [h. venusta](#)- size of plant

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 35 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**.