

January 2024



## *A quiet time of the year*

But there is still a lot going on whilst the plants lie dormant, not least of all the office based cataloguing, website updating and preparations for the new season.

I decided to use a blue cultivar in this year's newsletter banner, [H. 'Cutting Edge'](#), and below:



## *Collection update*

As I mentioned in last month's newsletter, December brings with it the requirement to update various databases we interact with through our business, and Plant Heritage National Collection. In the latter case I keep a master spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel, which I update throughout the year. I also use the Persephony Database, which has been developed to carry every National Collection under the auspices of Plant Heritage. The Persephony team has recently won some industry gongs for the system development and implementation – well deserved congratulations to all involved.

I always feel a set of mixed emotions completing the annual reports and this year was no different. It was the first year we haven't added anything to our collection but then we have spent a lot of time consolidating and moving plants around this year, so we may have missed a new sport or two. Once again, we have had a handful of losses. The losses we suffer are seldom unexpected but can still be disappointing.

This year we lost our last *H. hypoleuca*, a personal favourite of mine which I had great plans for a few years back when planning our

## *Hosta growing in the UK*

Hostas are generally happy to grow throughout the UK as we have a generally temperate climate. However, recent years have seen a rise in prolonged periods of wet and dry, which is not something hostas really like. Usually though, they survive, especially if water can drain during periods of wet, and there is a ready supply of water a hosta can bury its root to find during dry periods.

However, put a plant not suited to dealing with soil conditions in a pot to grow for any length of time and they won't do well. I suspect this is a prime reason for our loss of *H. hypoleuca* – see opposite. I did experiment with popping a piece of the plant into an old tree stump and it survived a couple of years but really needed a source of flowing water to help encourage root development into the structure. We were not able to provide this alongside all the other plant commitments and so eventually it perished.

species garden in the reservoir. I was hoping to augment the topography of the reservoir with various additions, including a rock wall. *Hosta hypoleuca* is a rock dweller in the wild and develops a root system able to extract moisture and nutrient from its environment without the need for much in the way of soil, see the [December 2014 newsletter](#) for more information.

Out of the offspring of *H. hypoleuca* we hold in our collection are two cultivars which have proven to grow happily in containers, [H. 'Bedford Blue'](#) and [H. 'Elkheart Lake'](#). Interestingly both cultivars were developed from [H. 'Halcyon'](#) and [H. 'June'](#) respectively, which has obviously endowed each cultivar with the ability to grow happily in containers. There are also some beautifully variegated cultivars developed from *H. hypoleuca* too, including three which use the notoriously unstable [H. 'Dorothy Benedict'](#) as the pod parent, [H. 'A Many-splendored Thing'](#), [H. 'Band of Gold'](#) and [H. 'Celestial'](#). All three have stable variegation and good growth when containerised, and prove you can use two quite tricky parents to create more reliable offspring.

Among the other losses was *H. 'Rhino Hide'* a beautifully richly coloured, thick leaved cultivar which we have had in our collection for quite a few years. It never really did anything much, was painfully slow growing and eventually suffered crown rot, as did *H. 'Brookwood Blue'*. Neither plant got anywhere near their quoted size so may have been weak plants to begin with.

We also finally bid farewell to our once beautiful *H. 'Spilt Milk'*. It took an agonisingly long time to get that plant to maturity and we have had it for many years. We have several regular customers constantly asking for cultivars with unstable, mottled foliage and we often get the impression they don't believe us when we say how difficult it can be to maintain that type of variegation when a plant can simply turn up its roots and die for no apparent reason.

We also lost *H. 'Vermont Frost'*, yet another attempt to produce a predominantly white leaved plant. I have noticed there is a 'new and improved' form of *H. 'White Feather'* now available – I don't trust myself to comment other than to say I won't be adding it to the collection.

One plus point to the occasional loss is the room to plant something else – always an exciting prospect.

Happy New Year

Team Mickfield Hostas

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I was feeling particularly wretched about the situation and had just filed my annual report when I was contacted by a student asking for a piece of *H. hypoleuca* to grow in a newly proposed rock garden. Although

I can no longer supply that specific plant, I did suggest an alternative source and I really hope his plans come together.

Sometimes timing isn't good but it did get me thinking about how difficult it is to replicate the ideal growing conditions for some plants, and whether we should really be looking at conserving their natural environments instead?

How robust and true can a replicated environment be, especially when under the influence of a rapidly fluctuating climate. This isn't to say the plants natural home in Japan isn't under similar stresses but at least it will have been able to mature and perhaps cling to life more robustly to ride out the effects of climate change better?



[Hosta 'Lakeside Breaking News'](#)

is perhaps my favourite of the offspring of *H. hypoleuca* we hold in our collection.

It grows well and has distinct characteristics of the species, such as white leaf undersides, slightly piecrust margins and bold veins.

