

March 2023



Welcoming the spring?

Recently it seems our weather has decided to tempt us with some thoughts of spring. However, we are all too wary of such promises and know a cold blast may be lurking ahead.

This month we hear from Lenore and I bring you up to date from the nursery, so here goes...



Greetings gardeners,

It's the first of March, the month of the vernal equinox, and a time when many gardeners greet spring! In Maine, however, March typically is another month of winter (milder, but still winter). In some years the snow melts and the temperatures warm up enough to begin garden work. Toward the end of the month our expanse of *Scilla siberica* will be in bloom, along with a few crocuses. But writing this in mid-February, we still have snow cover, currently around 12 inches, down from 20 inches earlier this month. The attached recent photo (above) shows the ice on our Stillwater River reflecting a spectacular sunset.

Meanwhile, our hostas are still dormant, resting to prepare for spring growth. I read that New Hampshire Hostas, a favorite hosta nursery in our neighboring state, has a pip emerging from their *hosta montana* 'Aureomarginata,' which tends to be quite early. In February in the Northeast U.S., this is encouraging! I would love to check my 'Aueromarginata' but will not disturb the protective cover of snow. Typically we don't see pips here until sometime in April.

Yet the days are lengthening. I note that both Maine and Suffolk each have approximately 11 hours of daylight currently, gaining minutes every day. Although I long for spring, and seeing my hostas return, I know that spring and summer in Maine are lovely, and definitely worth the wait. During my visit to the UK last fall, I

Arboretum and display garden

If anyone were to ask me what skills you need to be a horticulturist I would have to say that flexibility is perhaps the most important.

You always have to have at least several plans on the go to make use of what the weather throws at you. Last autumn we went from the driest period since the drought of 1976 to one of strong winds and rain. Although the ground had begun to loosen its dry grip on everything, it quickly became too wet to get on it with heavy equipment. Then, after a wet but warm autumn, we were suddenly plunged into a deep cold with intense frosts. Everywhere looked fabulous but we couldn't get out to do anything and the frosts penetrated deeply due to the wet preceding it.

was amazed by your breathtaking scenery! I imagine spring will be beautiful there.

Happy almost spring,
Lenore

Thank you Lenore, isn't interesting to compare notes and find so many similarities although I am very grateful not to have had 20 inches of snow to contend with.

As with Lenore, our first hosta to emerge is [*H. montana*](#) '[Aureomarginata](#)' (below), whose spears are rapidly emerging in our recent warm weather. It is exciting to witness this early spring emergence but it does put me a little on edge so early. Although I adore our temperate climate, we are witnessing more extreme forms of weather, which is making the work of horticulturists quite difficult to manage, let alone plan for.



Nursery update starting with Tunnel 5

Visitors to the nursery since Covid have had to navigate a less than optimum environment in tunnel 5, the one in the garden a little way from the others. Being Robin's last construction project, it wasn't built to his usual robust standards and suffered quite a bit from the ever stronger storms we are experiencing in the UK these days. Given our uncertainty over its structural integrity we have decided to close this tunnel to visitors and move at least one of each of the large and giant varieties housed there over to tunnel 3, which used to be a stock tunnel.

Tunnel 5 will now be used as a stock area for the arboretum and garden. It will also serve as a store for all duplicate cultivars from our collection, which we are looking to plant out in the garden or divide for stock.

Tunnel 3

Last season Roy and I worked hard to consolidate our stock into tunnels 1 and 2, tunnel 1 being the sales area. Despite having a great season, we still had to shoehorn the stock into the space but we eventually finished the job in late autumn.

It can be so very frustrating when you want to get on with something you have spent many weeks (or months indeed) looking forward to only to be thwarted by the weather.

It did however, give us all an opportunity to have a break, which was the first one for a considerable time due to all the projects we have going on. It also gave me some time to build the 'Identifying Hostas' series of newsletters, which I hope you found useful - you can find them in the [newsletter archive](#).

It is now getting on for a year since we were able to work on the north field. Thankfully, the dryness of 2022 meant that the growth we might have expected didn't happen but there is a lot of low-level clearance we need to re-do. We have our fingers crossed to be able to get a month or two of work in prior to the start of the season.

Arboretum and garden plants

Roy decided the trees we bought for the arboretum would benefit from a bit more shelter until such time as they can be planted - this autumn, fingers crossed. He has relocated them to the outside of tunnel 5 as we have turned it into a stock area for the arboretum and garden. All excess collection plants and large stock will be stored there along with other plants we have purchased for the garden.

Putting everything in one place will help us to look after them until such time as we can begin the planting phase. It isn't ideal but at least the plants don't seem to mind.

It was a sight to behold, an almost completely clear tunnel – but not for long!



I have spent most of February clearing it ready for its change of use into an exhibition space and installing a series of palletised upstands on which to put the large and giant varieties. This involved moving all the small pallets and the bricks they were standing on out of tunnel 5 and into tunnel 3.



Rather than build a series of benches I decided to create a random series of elevated areas which can be navigated via a wandering pathway. The pathway needed to be wide enough for a wheelbarrow and visitors using wheelchairs. It has been a bit like creating a series of displays at a flower show. I am currently filling the structure with the plants from tunnel 5, working through them to ensure I have something of every large and giant variety on display. It's a form of landscape gardening, without the digging!

Tunnel 4

Tunnel 4 is the original collection tunnel and still structurally sound. However, the benches are starting to suffer and Roy had to remove a whole section in 2021 after it partly collapsed under the weight of plants covered in snow.

Roy has been working to strip out the furthest bench in this tunnel, alongside the bench that he took out in 2021. He plans to install a new bench for the small and miniature varieties.

This work will be ongoing throughout the season, so if you are planning to visit be prepared!

[Hope to see you in 2023](#)

[Team Mickfield Hostas](#)

The 2023 show calendar

We are looking to be even busier this year than last, with more plant fairs, talks and nursery visits.

Once again we are planning to exhibit at the [Suffolk Show](#) at the end of May and [Hyde Hall](#) at the start of August.

Event organisers have been busy confirming bookings and there is an eagerness in the air as we look forward to spring.

Keep an eye on [the calendar](#) as events get confirmed.

Open weekends

We are also planning another 10 long weekends of opening the nursery. This year we are opening from Friday through to Monday of every weekend in May and June and two weekends in July – see the calendar for more details.

We are happy to open by appointment from April through to September but you will need to arrange this in advance by calling or emailing us in the usual way.

Specials in 2023

As part of consolidating the collection we will be doing more division of excess plants, so there will be the opportunity to purchase some of the plants we currently list as unavailable. Obviously, not all cultivars are suitable for this, but it is always worth asking if there is something you have been trying to source. As ever we will do our best to accommodate any reasonable request.