

May 2023



## *Personal choices*

I am often asked why have chosen to collect certain plants and not others. It all rather depends on your collecting motivation, for some it is to have anything you haven't already got and for others it's more about liking certain aspects of a plant.

This Lenore shares some of our favourite cultivars, whilst I look at some of the pitfalls of collecting...



## *Rich colour, endless forms and textures...*

If you like hostas it isn't hard to appreciate how collecting them can get out of hand. There is such a rich variety available and because hostas are so easy to grow, there is little not to love about them.

I draw the line at some varieties because I do not like the colour combinations or they prove too tricky to grow. I can appreciate the beauty of most cultivars but wouldn't necessarily choose to put them in my garden. As you can see in the top photo, two particular favourites of mine, [H. 'Winter Snow'](#) and [H. 'Cutting Edge'](#) (below) have made it to my own small plot.



I like them both for very different reasons and enough to add them to my own small garden where they have to exist with

## *Collecting hostas*

Our collection began, as many of you will already know, as a gift from a friend. Gifts can be mixed blessings but to a plantaholic, the gift of a plant can imply so much more...

The pressure is on to make sure you don't kill the plant, either through neglect or too much tender loving care. The pressure to do the plant justice, and therefore, prove your friendship, can get completely out of hand. Receiving a division of a much loved plant can be even more fraught with stress but, as hostas are really tough and easily divisible, it is fun to watch its development in your own space.

I always suggest friends buying plants together should opt for

minimum attention. Lenore has written about some of her choices and I have popped links to the relevant cultivars in her piece so you can explore further, together with more photos in the side column:

Greetings Hosta Gardeners,

Friends sometimes ask, "What is your favorite hosta?" There is no way to answer that question! I cherish every hosta, and each has its own beauty, its own attributes, its own personality. Still, certain hostas do come to mind when I think of favorites. These tend to be very vigorous and dependable, look great all season long, and they are stunning. They make a statement in the garden and I say "ahhh" each time I see them. Here are some of my many special favorites:

**[Hosta 'Corn Muffins'](#)** (Beilstein/Zillis 2009). This is a medium-size hosta, (13" by 31" in the U.S., taller in the UK), a cross between *H.* 'Glory' and *H.* 'King Tut.' It begins with a glowing chartreuse color and turns golden yellow. The leaves are convexly cupped and rounded, with rippled margins, and very corrugated, forming a lovely, dome-shaped mound. It produces lavender flowers, June to July in the U.S. I planted 'Corn Muffins' near a front walkway and notice it every time I walk by!

**[Hosta 'Forbidden Fruit'](#)** (Marco Fransen N/R). This hosta is a tetraploid sport of *H.* 'Orange Marmalade,' thus is vigorous with thick leaves. The leaves have dark blue-green edges and a striking orange-yellow center, noticeable from across the garden. It grows well in sun or shade and produces pale lavender flowers. 'Forbidden Fruit' (below) grows to medium size (17" by 36") in my Maine garden, but in the UK may be a large 20" x 45."



**[Hosta 'Irish Luck'](#)** (LaLonde/Naylor Creek 2007). 'Irish Luck' is an open-pollinated seedling of *H.* 'Invincible.' It is a medium hosta sporting glossy, thick, dark green leaves with a very rippled edge.

different cultivars in order to divide and share at a later date, which many do. However, I have many customers who deliberately buy the same as each other, throwing down the 'who's the best gardener' gauntlet.

A gift of a plant via a division sets the bar high for your efforts, so once you have managed to keep your plant alive, the competitive edge will creep in so beware getting the tape measure out each time you visit the original. However you come to own a hosta you are in great company and there is so much joy to be had.

### *Some more of Lenore's choices:*

***Hosta 'Corn Muffins'***



***Hosta 'Irish Luck'***



***Hosta 'Pineapple Upsidedown Cake'***



Its pale lavender flowers are fragrant. This tall (18" high), shiny, vase-shaped hosta is vigorous and stands out in the garden.

**Hosta 'Pineapple Upsidedown Cake'** (Zilis/Solberg 1999). This medium-size hosta is a tissue-culture sport of *H.* 'Pineapple Poll.' It emerges with green leaves that turn yellow, then white (in a sunny spot), with a dark green, ruffled edge. 'Pineapple Upsidedown Cake' creates a lovely, bushy mound of lance-shaped leaves, and the color change over the season is striking.

**Hosta 'Winter Snow'** (Winterberry Farms/Anderson 2003). This lovely, giant hosta is a tissue-culture sport of popular *H.* 'Sum and Substance.' It has thick, shiny, chartreuse leaves turning golden, with a creamy, wavy edges. It produces pale lavender flowers in late summer. 'Winter Snow' is ploidy, 3-3-3, which means it has an extra set of chromosomes and thus is vigorous with good substance. It reaches 33" by 82" inches in the U.S., a bit taller and less wide in the UK, with pale lavender flowers on four-foot scapes in late summer. It creates a striking garden presence.



If you are looking to buy some new hostas (aren't we all?) these are some great choices.

All the best,  
Lenore

Lenore's photo of *H.* 'Winter Snow' shows how lustrous the leaves get as the season progresses. It's funny how we both have this one among our favourites.

At the nursery I have so much more space to use but it has been expedient to continue growing in pots whilst exhibiting. Now we have largely stopped exhibiting there is less need for them to be grown in this way unless the cultivar thrives in a container, or because its form demands elevation. This is why I had to take my absolute favourite hosta out of my garden as the leaves were dragging on the ground. I have a particular love of large leaves that cascade downwards in a fountain shape – just like [H. 'Atlantis'](#)

## *Collecting timeline*

Every plant in our collection has a story behind its origins, many of the stories repeat, for example over a few years we systematically added a shed load of cultivars from a single source. It was less about being choosy and more about the fact we hadn't already got those cultivars.

The advent of micro-propagation methods has resulted in an ever greater wealth of cultivars introduced to the market. The wider availability of new cultivars began to outstrip our ability to keep up – both in time and money. As a result, in recent years we have got to the point of only adding in something we really like or adding our own sports, if they come to anything.

## **Exhibiting our hostas**

Space, and the need to catalogue the plants, resulted in a rather uninspiring layout of rows in tunnels, but that was always lost underneath the foliage in the season.

It has long been a wish of mine to have the plants in the ground and arranged in a garden so they are not all fighting for space, and we can move around them in a more engaging way.

The majority of the plants really need to be grown in the ground, so they can grow to their maximum potential. However, they are more prone to weather damage and that is something we have needed to guard against due to exhibiting commitments. However, our decision to quit exhibiting means

(photo below - part of our display at Hyde Hall in 2022)



I adore prominent veins and rippled margins so, when these elements appear together in a cultivar, I struggle to resist it, even to the point of tolerating a bit more colour in the leaves.

### Exhibiting your hostas

If you have found your love of hostas beginning to compromise the space you have, why not look up?

- Find a tall, statement pot, which you can place smaller pots around
- Elevate your hostas on shelves, or a theatre.
- Hang baskets (in shade of course)
- Create a stage – see tunnel 3 in the video (side column).

This last idea took me back to exhibiting, when you have limited space but a lot to show off. Space limitations can help you be judicious about what you decide to buy and not tempt you into buying plants that will dominate as area if you want more variety in that space. However, nothing will stop some of us just buying one more hosta because, well, it would be rude not to!

[Happy gardening](#)

[Team Mickfield Hostas](#)

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we can gradually phase out the collection tunnels and focus on transferring the plants to open ground. In the meantime we have converted a former stock tunnel to an exhibition tunnel, click on the image below to view progress:



### What next?

Succession planning is part of the role of being a Plant Heritage National Collection Holder. However, it is quite an undertaking to commit to such a large collection. As a consequence we have decided to start dividing collection plants for the arboretum and for sale. This way we can ensure the plants get distributed and protected in gardens across the UK whilst we do what we can to protect the backbone of the collection at the nursery.

Of course you do not need to have a large collection of anything to get involved with [Plant Heritage](#) and you can even elect to take on a single plant as a 'Plant Guardian' as part of the plant conservation effort – if this sounds interesting why not find out more.