



Size matters

Hostas come in as many different sizes as varieties and, because the growth characteristics of any hosta depend largely on the environment in which it is growing, any attempt to size mature plants is problematic.

The subject of classifying hostas according to size has been debated at length but from a hosta devotee's perspective we need to get away from terminology semantics and simply enjoy the smallest of hosta varieties...

Starting point

Hostas are sized according to the height of the plant mound (not including the height of the flowers). Some growers also give a mound width size, but the spread of the plant mound can be largely controlled by the gardener. Therefore, if the plant becomes too big when mature, it can simply be split. A general rule of thumb is that a hosta will grow approximately 2-3 times its height in width.

That seem simple enough, so what is the problem?

Whilst most hosta experts agree on the actual size of the categories, there is still a fundamental disagreement over what the categories should be called. In particular, which term should be used for the smallest of the hostas - dwarf or miniature. Both terms appear to mean the same thing both sides of the Atlantic, although one is an adjective and one is a noun:

	Oxford English Dictionary	The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language
Dwarf	An animal or plant much below the ordinary size	An atypically small animal or plant
Miniature	Much smaller than normal	Being on a small or greatly reduced scale

The following table highlights a selection of size classifications used alongside the American Hosta Society (AHS) definitions:

	American Hosta Society	Savory's Gardens Inc	Papou hosta	Shady Oaks	Fransen Hostas	Us
Miniature	4-6"	<10"	<4"	<7"	4-8"	
Dwarf	<4"		4-6"			<6"
Small	6-10"	10-15"	6-10"	7-15"	8-15"	6-12"
Medium	10-18"	15-18"	10-18"	15-22"	15-24"	12-18"
Large	18-28"	18-24"	18-28"	>22"	24-35"	18-24"
Giant	>28"	>24"	>28"		35-60"	>24"

Our smallest hostas

Next year we will have quite a few new additions to the [dwarf varieties in our collection](#). Among them are the following, which we will be able to offer for sale in 2008. Full details will appear on the website over the winter so we have linked to images on the Hosta Library for now:

- H.* 'Great Escape' [Hosta Library images](#)
- H.* 'Green Mouse Ears' [Hosta Library images](#)
- H.* 'Imp' [Hosta Library images](#)
- H.* 'Little Jay' [Hosta Library images](#)
- H.* 'Little Red Joy' [Hosta Library images](#)
- H.* 'Red Cadet' [Hosta Library images](#)
- H.* 'Small Parts' [Hosta Library images](#)

And here are the names of the dwarf varieties in our collection that we will be able to offer for sale for the first time:

- H.* 'Eleanor Lachman'
- H.* 'Little Red Rooster'
- H.* 'Medusa'
- H.* 'Tom Thumb'
- H.* 'Tortifrons'

As you can see there is broad agreement over the small, medium, large and giant categories and sizes but there is less consistency over both the terms and sizes of the smallest hosta categories.

Our dilemma

We use the same logical system of sizes: small, medium, large and giant but our smallest hostas are termed 'dwarf'. However, with the introduction of ever more 'miniature' varieties we feel that rather than introduce a sub-category for the tiniest plants, there might be merit in re-naming our 'dwarf' category 'miniature'. As yet we are undecided, because we do not wish to further complicate matters. In modern parlance the term miniature suggests ever shrinking in size - think of electronics and the trend towards minituration in many everyday items. Therefore, our inclination would be to do the opposite to the AHS and call the smallest varieties 'miniature' and the slightly larger ones 'dwarf'!!

New additions to the collection

It is important to remain consistent but if you read the Hosta Registration lists you will see cultivar descriptions that quote leaf sizes to several decimal places! Plant registration is analogous to patent registration (if less long-winded) but such precision needs to be tempered with the realisation that hostas are plants and do not necessarily conform to tight classification. Therefore, although we do classify our hostas using their original registration or breeders specifications, we also advise our customers if we have experienced the actual growth of the hostas deviating substantially from that expected.

An article in the RHS publication *The Garden*, in July this year, focused on 'small' hostas using the AHS classification for their 'miniature' category. The AHS definition of miniature also looks at plant spread and suggests the maximum for the miniature classification should be 38 square cm. This helps classify varieties such as *H. 'County Park'* as a 'small' - although the height of the plant puts it in the miniature category, it has leaves as round as the plant is tall, so the spread of the mature plant is larger than that of a miniature. The article was a lovely introduction to some of the smallest hostas but using the AHS definition of miniature was perhaps a little misleading - there was no mention of the fact that the AHS also have a 'dwarf' category for hostas under four inches in height!

So what do our customers think?

Over recent years we have come to realize that our customers are more size conscious about the smaller varieties, especially bonsai growers who are often looking for very small plants to add scale to their creations. On the whole customers appreciate anything that will make their decision making process easier and so we recommend you consider the size categories in your decision to buy a variety but don't become obsessed by it. If the plant becomes too large for the spot in which you put it then you can always split it and either share the remains with friends or plant them elsewhere in your garden.

PSST...supersized hostas

Plants directly out of tissue culture will often exhibit growth beyond that expected. This accelerated growth is a byproduct of the tissue culture process and the plants generally settle down into their true characteristics during their second season. For this reason we seldom offer tissue culture sales stock if they are not exhibiting their true characteristics at the point of sale.

Next month: A short guide to planning which hostas to choose for your garden

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 30 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](#).

Among the other varieties we will be able to offer for sale next year are the following stunners:



H. 'Climax'



H. 'Dragon Tails'



H. 'Hanky Panky'

We will share the full list of all our additions to the collection once they are entered onto the site, together with a preview of the varieties we will have for sale in 2008 so keep a look out...

The last words this month?

We couldn't resist throwing a further piece of analysis into the frame - How about a 'Suffolk Classification System'? (we suggest you say the following phonetically but not out loud):

Tiny-wee (miniature)
Doddy (dwarf)
Lit-lun (small)
Middlin (medium)
Hudge (large)
Hudge grit-un (giant)!!