



## Hosta 'Fortunei'

Sometimes plants which were once considered species are 'reduced' to cultivar status and this month we feature one such example, *H. 'Fortunei'*. We also return to the subject of nomenclature in our side column, which relates well to our spotlight plant, and attempts to categorise it...

### Hosta 'Fortunei'

This hosta was among the first introduced into Europe from Japan, and the debate over its true origins continues to this day.

The history of *H. 'Fortunei'*, which Schmid outlines, in *The Genus Hosta*, makes interesting reading and highlights the enthusiastic and somewhat chaotic way, in which new plants were introduced into Europe from China and Japan in the 1800s.

Robert Fortune was an avid plant explorer, who made several trips to China and Japan in the mid 1800s. During a visit to Philipp von Siebold at his home in Nagasaki, he acquired a hosta from von Siebold's extensive collection of new plants, which was later named *Funkia fortunei*.

The exact origins of this particular plant has never been verified beyond Nagasaki.

According to Schmid, Fortune exhibited *H. 'Fortunei'* at the Royal Horticultural Society's summer show of 1863 as a "Japanese *Funkia* with glaucous leaves and French white flowers". It must have been one of the first hostas to be shown at an RHS show.

On his return from Japan von Siebold planted his *H. 'Fortunei'* into his garden. We could be forgiven for thinking that he was not particularly interested in this plant, because it appears to have remained un-catalogued until after his death. It has many similarities to *H. sieboldiana*, which is probably why Miquel made a note of it as *Funkia sieboldiana* var. *condensata*.

The plot thickened when Schmid's investigations led to the conclusion that the plant Fortune bought back from Japan, and exhibited, was indeed *H. 'Tokudama'*. Maekawa suggested the plant should be elevated from a variety of *H. sieboldiana* to the rank of species, *H. tokudama* in 1940. Schmid's investigations questioned this, because of the lack of the necessary evidence for species status, and the plant was reduced to a cultivar.



#### Nomenclature notes

One of our subscribers suggested an article on the correct use of abbreviated terms when referring to the naming of plants, so here goes:

#### *Hosta* or *H.*

Binomial nomenclature (sometimes referred to as binominal or binary) describes a naming convention of two parts. The first part of the name refers to the genus, and the second to the species or cultivar.

Plant names are the same as the names of any other subject, so the genus should always be written with an initial capital letter and be in italics, wherever it appears in a sentence. The species should always follow in lower-case italics. Cultivar names should be written enclosed in single quotes, capitalised but not italicized.

Abbreviation of the genus name is also permitted as an italicized capital followed by a full stop and space, before any second part of the name. It is also good practice not to begin sentences with the abbreviated term.

#### Why is this important?

This isn't simply nit-picking, there are good reasons behind the

A more recent twist to the tale is proposed by Mark Zilis in *The Hostapedia*. In his book Zilis suggests that *H. 'Aoki'* could be the missing link in the story of *H. 'Fortunei'*, which is another interesting theory worth exploring. Zilis also contests that there is "no single plant that can truly be called *Hosta 'Fortunei'*". The categorising of *H. 'Fortunei'* cultivars into a 'Group' has been proposed in Article 3.2 of the ICNCP (Brickell et al 2004), which also seems like a sensible idea. The debate seems set to continue.

### So, what do we think?

*Hosta 'Fortunei'* is very similar to *H. sieboldiana* in many ways - see images below, so a relationship with the latter would seem logical.



*Hosta 'Fortunei'*



*Hosta sieboldiana*

Given the plethora of plants introduced in the 1800s, from Japan in particular, we feel there is a strong probability that future research may lead to the conclusion that there are fewer actual species than currently thought. Though much has already been done towards this rationalisation, it might be that science produces a way to identify relationships more precisely, so another round of re-categorisation may become possible sometime in the future.

*Hosta 'Fortunei'* is what could be referred to as 'hosta bog-standicus' because of its regular leaf shape, flower shape and colour, and size of plant mound.

It is a cultivar which has been available for many years and related cultivars can be found in gardens across the UK. We have lost track of the number of times people ask us to identify a plant they have inherited. We listen to the description, and even without a photograph, we can quite often identify key characteristics of *H. 'Fortunei'*.

Because we have been collecting hosta for so many years, and sourced most of our older varieties from reputable growers and breeders both in Europe and America, we have *H. 'Fortunei'* related varieties, which have changed name and designation over the past 40 years. We are still trying to establish whether some of the plants we have, can still be known by the names they were given when we bought them.

Next month we will list the varieties we hold in our collection, which are related to *H. 'Fortunei'* and continue to explore the issues around this particular branch of the genus. Among them you may well spot some very familiar plants, which still have tremendous value in landscaping and are good, reliable additions to any garden.

**Next month:** Continuing the *H. 'Fortunei'* family of cultivars...

establishment of such codes and conventions.

They are helpful in showing the origins and agreed classification of plants according to their position in the genus. For example, differentiating between an agreed species and a variety of an agreed species, such as *H. kikutii* var. *polynuron*.

This helps avoid the issue of mistaken identity, as many varieties of species look visually indistinguishable.

Forms of species have visual characteristics that can distinguish them from their species origins, such as *H. montana* f. *macrophylla*. Usually the second part of the name refers to the characteristic, which the form exhibits. In this case *macrophylla* means large-leaved.

### Nomenclature standardisation

Carl Linnaeus developed the binomial nomenclature system of naming plants. The publication of *Species Plantarum* in 1753 is considered the start of nomenclature standardisation.

### The International Code of Nomenclature for

algae, fungi and plants, or ICN, governs the use of binomial nomenclature. There is a separate set of rules for naming cultivars, cultivars, Groups and grex, called the **International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants**, or ICNCP.

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 38 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**.

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