



How to identify hostas Part 1

This month we begin a series on ways in which you can identify your hostas.

This is quite a task given the number of cultivars on the market, and the fact that quite often plants are sold with only the genus on the label, no label, or given away...



Identifying hostas

This is the perfect time of year to get in some hosta identification if you have lost your labels, forgotten what you bought, or simply been given an unnamed division.

With the issue of duplication and huge range of cultivars available, it is quite difficult to be absolutely sure of a hosta identification. The smart move is to take a photo of the plant (with its label) when you buy it and, if you buy it at a flower show then perhaps take a photo of the mature version so you can see how it develops.

We also encourage you to spend a little time becoming more familiar with the plants you have selected for your garden and there are numerous resources on the Internet to help you do this. It is a worthwhile exercise due to the large number of retailers selling all manner of plants, named or otherwise. Without the basic information how do you know if the plant you have bought will actually suit the conditions for where you plan to plant it?

At this point of the season you can do some data gathering and make a note of the following characteristics and, even better, take some photos if you haven't already.

Leaf characteristics

It is problematic to be definitive above the dominant leaf colours as they often change during the season and definitions of

Resources

Throughout my research into hostas I have used numerous resources, which I still use but they all work from the starting point of a name, or a suggestion of a name, to begin the process.

Our Search Page



After spending a lot of time listening to our customers and narrowing down the questions we get asked, we came up with our 'search' page. Our search page only covers cultivars we have for sale and works on a narrowing down of three broad categories of characteristics; dominant leaf

colour can vary widely. We have taken the registered details as the primary source of accuracy and adjusted with our own experience of growing the varieties.

1. What are the dominant leaf colour(s) and do they change during the season?
2. Do the leaves have a sheen, are they glossy or matt?
3. How many vein pairs are there on the leaves?
4. Are the leaves textured and thick (heavy substance) or delicate and thin?
5. Is there any corrugation (rugosity) to the leaves, or are they essentially flat?

Plant shape and habit

The shape, and habit, of the plant is very important.

1. Do the leaves droop or stand erect?
2. What is the overall shape of the plant, vase like, fountain like, etc?

Don't forget immature plants can often look quite different to mature plants which have had time to develop their characteristics.

Leaf vein counts are useful for mature plant comparisons, especially when registered dimensions can change as plants become more established.

We have had many experiences of changes to expected plant dimensions and have had to re-categorise plants as a result. Sometimes it's really obvious in the collection tunnel when a variety towers above its friends and we subsequently discover the plant was registered a bit too early and growth has exceeded expectations. The same can happen in the other direction with disappointing growth experienced. The process of tissue culture can result in immature plants 'hyped up on hormones' for the first few years of its life. A great example of this was [H. 'Slim and Trim'](#), launched as a miniature but was growing like a larger cultivar. It took a number of years for the plant to recover from the tissue culture process and settle into the promised dimensions. It has since proven to be a fast grower and multiplies well, and is one of the best miniatures to emerge in recent years.

Plant size

How long have you had the plant (roughly). If longer than 6 years it is likely to have reached its mature dimensions, or be well on its way, especially if it is in the ground. Notwithstanding issues of stunted growth in times of drought, you should have a good idea

colour, plant size and flower colour.

This facility is useful when you are trying to identify hostas for your garden. However, it can be used in reverse to potentially identify any hostas you have but it is obviously limited if you take a look at the range of characteristics in the main body of the newsletter.



The starting point is dominant leaf colour - see image above. Click on the one you think it is and that will take you into a subset of the cultivars, which are then organised by plant size and flower colour-coded links to more information - see image below:

Back to top		Blue/green leaves - white redrigins			
Client: over 25"	Large: 18-24"	Medium: 12-18"	Small: 6-12"	Miniature: up to 6"	
Back to top Hampshire County "Lenny Water" Wrenay Robert Frost	Rak Dene Cranford Dark Star El Paso Iona Tony Belle Lakeside Whopody Warwick Edge	Loverhills Lane Gold Edger Scorpion Rita Clark Venencia Lake Yin			
Back to top		Blue/green leaves - yellow redrigins			
Client: over 25"	Large: 18-24"	Medium: 12-18"	Small: 6-12"	Miniature: up to 6"	
Back to top Liberty Regal Splendor Wonderbar	Nancy Hutchinson Aurora Frost Blue River Derek Cox Dress Wilson Earth Angel Gill Edge Glen Hurlingham Hilford Weaver Snow Mountain	Blue Flame Frank Frost Framingham Janet and Katie Lakeside Schindlerage Valley's Cluster Warwick Curlew Whispering	Daisy Blue Framed Frodo Homing Dove Patricia		
Back to top		Blue/green - gold redrigins			
Client: over 25"	Large: 18-24"	Medium: 12-18"	Small: 6-12"	Miniature: up to 6"	
Back to top Olive Bailey Langdon Rebecca Waller		Katie Q Rebecca Waller			
Back to top		Blue/green leaves - silver/rose/green redrigins			
Client: over 25"	Large: 18-24"	Medium: 12-18"	Small: 6-12"	Miniature: up to 6"	
Back to top Frances Williams Wee La La	Dark Shadow	Toy Soldier	Alby		
Back to top		gold leaves			
Client: over 25"	Large: 18-24"	Medium: 12-18"	Small: 6-12"	Miniature: up to 6"	
Back to top Sun and Solentance	Alyson Gold August Moon Sutter's Mill	English Summer Excitation Eye Catcher Folly Flower Song (collab) "Frost Bonanza" Gill by Association London Engagem Goldsmith Janet's Gold Sox Daisy Woolfor Gold Woodford Gold	Glen Rose Gold Edger Golden Scorpion Valley's Claret Top Clara	Gold Fairy Alby Penny	
Back to top		gold leaves - white redrigins			

The end of the season is approaching...

Our recommendation for dividing hostas up to the end of September still holds, especially if you are lucky enough to have been blessed with rain. At the nursery we are only re-potting plants desperate for more room but have largely stopped dividing hostas for the season

how large the plant mound is if you have had the plant for a few years. If it is still immature you can probably still make an educated guess but if you bought the plant without any information you may need to wait a while for the characteristics to develop sufficiently to identify it.

1. What is the height of the plant mound (without the flowers)?
2. What is the diameter of the plant mound?

Flowers

Often the appearance of the flowers can help narrow down the search but once again, definitions of flower colour can be variable. The difference between near white and pale lavender is quite subjective, and sometimes the bud colour can be quite different to the actual flower colour, once open.

If the flower holds a fragrance then that helps to know but yet again, it can be barely discernible to those of us not blessed with a finely tuned sense of smell.

1. What is the flower colour?
2. Is the bud a different colour?
3. What is the colour of the flower scape (flower stem)?
4. How tall is the flower scape?
5. Is the flower fragrant?
6. When did the flower emerge?

The answer to the final question can skew the research if the plant has become stressed during the season, sufficiently for it to produce flowers outside of its usual flowering time. Some cultivars will flower more than once in a season too.

NOTE: do remember that hostas can look quite different if planted in different environments, and subjected to different weather conditions.

So how do we go about trying to identify hostas?

There is no substitute for familiarity and experience but perhaps we can help share some of our knowledge by looking at specific branches of the genus in the hope that some of these general pointers will help you further. To this end I will spend a few issues of the newsletter, over the autumn and winter, visiting selected branches of the genus and sharing the key characteristics and what to look out for.

This move will effectively re-purpose a lot of information we have

because of the lack of rainfall. Even though we were able to better control the climate this year, under net rather than plastic, the lack of rainfall and prolonged high temperatures has taken its toll and the leaves have been in overdrive producing food for their roots. This should result in more shoots for next year but at the expense of a longer season this year. We are also seeing a good amount of fresh growth, encouraged by chopping back spent leaves earlier on, which will help the plants produce more food if we continue to get the sunlight, and rain of course. Usually we get to September and start to see the end of the season approaching but this year it is a bit more advanced due to the extreme heat we have witnessed.

Hopefully we will have enough good looking plants for our talks and plant fair commitments until the end of the month but I suspect we will need to start removing leaves for mail order requests.

This year we will be stopping mail order at the end of October, so the last mailing date will be Monday 24th October 2022.

However, there is lots of time between now and then to plant for the 2023 season. Autumn has always been a better time to plant perennials as they take less monitoring over winter and can establish themselves ready for the new season. If, like us, you have yet to have any significant rain then you will need to wait on the weather before considering planting in the ground. Container planting is a much better idea until the weather changes. If the weather continues dry the plants will survive just fine over winter in containers, if

already covered during the 16 years of publishing these newsletters and so I plan to update the archive over winter. I will be removing the older, out of date newsletters, and replace them gradually with newer material. They are all in PDF form so are downloadable until then.



I am hoping that during this process I can come up with an easy to use hosta identification method and if you would like to add your thoughts to it then please do get in touch.

Happy gardening

Team Mickfield Hostas

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left in a sheltered spot. Don't be tempted to put them in a greenhouse as they risk drying out and will not experience the cold they need for optimum over-wintering.

Our last Open Weekend of the season

From tomorrow the nursery will be open from 10am to 4pm until Monday: **2nd - 5th September.** We also have three plant fairs left on [our calendar](#), including a new event at [Somerleyton Hall](#). Tickets include access to the 12 acres of gardens.

