

February 2024



### *Looking forward...*

I never fail to get excited when I see my hellebores starting to flower every year as it is the herald of all those precious spring colours. It helps build the anticipation of the hosta shoots finally arriving in all their various colours, in a couple of months.

This time Lenore kicks off proceedings with a photograph to whet our appetites for the season ahead:



### *Greetings Hosta Growers,*

February is a time for dreaming about hostas! Many of us are recalling the beauty of our hostas last season and eagerly awaiting their return. More than any other perennial, hostas seem to me like old friends who disappear in the fall but return in the spring, fully recharged and ready to put on a show.

Winter is a great time for reflection and planning. We recall gardening successes, challenges, and failures, and we can use that experience to plan for the coming season. In my garden, our successes were the very lovely hostas, maturing well and filling in the garden spaces. A popular belief in Maine is that perennials tend to sleep, creep, then leap over the first three years. If you planted new hostas in 2021, you may well notice them leaping this year!

Reflecting on last season's challenges, I tend to focus on the hardiness and placement of plants, as well as general garden improvements. I review photos and garden notes, noticing which plants did well, and

### *Suggested alternatives*

Although bad weather makes me feel restless, it is good to be able to spend some time on the necessary updates to our website.

Alongside the routine changes and production of our new availability lists I realised it has been quite a while since I last updated the suggested alternatives for varieties, we don't currently list as available for sale.

This requires me to revisit every variety page to check the appropriateness of the

which seemed not to thrive. Is it time to replant some hostas in different locations or divide some that are becoming too large or outgrowing their space? What new hosta varieties would I like to plant? And what about garden design? Would some hostas make more of a statement in a different location? Do some beds need additions of different-sized hostas (e.g., a few smaller hostas toward the front)? Should we add some companion plants? Should we grow more hostas in pots rather than in-ground? This is the perfect time to make some of those decisions.

As to gardening failures, we all experience them, despite our best efforts. If we've lost a hosta during the past season, we might decide whether to try again with the same variety, or say good-bye. I lost four hostas to foliar nematodes last year. All were favorites, and were thriving and beautiful prior to last season. I've decided to seek out duplicates and plant them in a different location, as I can no longer plant in the contaminated soil. In that location, I plan to use potted hostas and make the area beautiful again.

Soon we'll be happily tending to our garden beds. Meanwhile, let's enjoy this time to dream about hostas!

Best wishes to all,  
Lenore

### **Planning for change**

As Lenore mentions, this is a great time to reflect on changes to our gardens. As hostas are happy to be moved, don't be afraid to do this if you feel your plant might do better in another location, or look more fabulous planted in a different area.

I am currently thinking of re-siting two of my hostas growing between a beautiful magnolia stellata and a strawberry tree – see below. At present their growth is being compromised although they don't appear to be suffering yet.



As this tree matures it is taking more moisture from the soil so if I want to continue to co-locate these hostas, they might do better in containers. Or, I could move them somewhere else completely.

suggestions, and to double check those we do have for sale.

Quite often the suggested alternatives represent a better grower, or a cultivar with better characteristics.

With such a large collection, we are highly unlikely to be able to list everything, not least of all because there are quite a few varieties that do not grow well enough to divide without risk of loss. Also, I only list varieties on the website, which I have more than four of. This leaves quite a number unlisted and just available from the nursery, or at talks and plant fairs I attend during the season.

This is why it is worth asking if you are after something specific.

### **The 'Wish' list**

We no longer operate our wish list, having satisfied all the outstanding requests apart from those cultivars we are unlikely to ever be able to supply.

As we have begun to divide our Collection plants, we will be able to offer small numbers of cultivars you may not be able to source easily elsewhere. Once the season gets underway anything we can supply more than four of will be added to the website, and I may post these on Instagram too.

Divisions tend to carry a higher price as they are already exhibiting their mature characteristics, and tend to grow more quickly due to an established root system.

Also, if a variety is particularly rare it will be priced accordingly but unlikely to ever demand the

Hostas tend to look their most vibrant in the first part of the season when the leaves are fresh. However, there are many cultivars that develop their colours as the season progresses and can look their best in autumn. Selecting cultivars that change colour gives an extra dimension to a garden scheme. I rather like the cultivars that develop their colours as the season changes. There is so much beautiful vibrancy already jostling for attention in the first half of the year that these cultivars can act as a foil for, leaving their brilliance for later, when colour is more at a premium. If you would like to find out more see our [archive newsletters](#) on the subjects of viridescence, lutescence and albescence to see what I mean.

### Show memories

As I mentioned in the header, the excitement I feel every spring when the hostas start to emerge is something I never tire of. Indeed, it is so much sweeter now I don't suffer the stress of staging early spring exhibits. Back in 2013, during one of the coldest springs on record, I asked to stage an educational display at the Harrogate Spring Flower Show to explain why the hostas were so late emerging. It was one the best received displays we ever staged because visitors could identify with the problem. Being a couple of hundred miles further north from our nursery they were excited to realise their plants hadn't died, they were just late up!



We received a Premier Gold Award and a trophy for it, which made up for the stressful time in the run up and build.

Next month I will look at companion planting for better hosta health. Meanwhile, happy planning,

Team Mickfield Hostas

kind of money paid for speciality snowdrops!

Over the years I have tried to make it obvious which cultivars we have available for sale, but I am aware it is not obvious to everyone. You do not need to browse the entire collection to find suitable plants...

### Browsing available varieties

I have created a sub-section of the website where you can browse just those varieties listed for sale, linked in purple in the left-hand navigation panel. If you use the navigation within these pages you will stay within this section. If you go back to using the side column you will find yourself back in the main website where everything is listed.

Any newly added cultivars will also feature in this section, on the Availability List and Search pages too.

### Visiting the nursery

Over the years we have tried to convince people that the nursery is the best place to come and see the range of hostas we have for sale. It is the best place to find something unusual or rare, and everyone who visits says how worth while it is to make the effort. We will be open long weekends throughout May, June and July this year – [check our calendar](#) for more details.