



## *Mini marvels*

As with small hosta cultivars, miniature ones can be a source of immense fun when you plant them to show off other, more statuesque varieties, or use them together in a pot.

The photo below shows part of our first RHS Gold Medal exhibit at Malvern in 2011.



## *Growing miniature hostas*

I have often covered how to grow hostas and the importance of looking at the root system to determine the type of medium in which to grow them. Miniature varieties need to have friable, open soil, which drains well during dormancy, but also has the ability to retain some moisture during the growing season. You can add grit to the soil to open it up, and a little vermiculite will help retain moisture, otherwise our miniature varieties grow in the same medium as all our others – visit our [FAQ page](#) for more details.

Miniature varieties are perfect for container growing and some grow well in the ground too, but I would always suggest starting them off in a container to give them the best chance of growth without having to fight with other garden planting. Some have a prodigious spread despite their lack of height so can be used as ground cover once well established.

## *Mini vs small*

An important point worth mentioning is the height definition we use to categorise miniature varieties.

Any cultivar 6" or less in height we class as a miniature.

The American Hosta Society (AHS) focuses on leaf size rather than height, stating that a miniature variety should not have a leaf in excess of 6 square inches and that [H. 'Blue Mouse Ears'](#) is the definitive miniature.



Over time we have experienced mixed success growing variegated miniatures with many simply not proving garden worthy. I struggled to think of a single one that has stood the test of time. The nearest have been [H. 'Rock Island Line'](#), [H. 'Ops'](#) and [H. 'Lakeside Miss Muffett'](#) but even these cultivars have had their moments. Some of this lack of success may well be down to the fact we do not have the time to devote to their wellbeing, so they have to take their chances with everything else.

#### [Hosta 'Slim and Trim'](#)



One of the most reliable miniatures I have ever grown and one that always seems to generate a giggle over its name. It is very much like a miniature version of [H. 'Sherborne Swift'](#), which I featured in the April issue. It has a long season too and keeps the bloom on its 5" x 3", arrow-shaped leaves well throughout. As a consequence I have used it extensively, in isolation and as a companion plant to show off other varieties – see the side column.

#### [Hosta 'Small Parts'](#)



This little beauty multiplies well and has 2" x 1" satiny leaves held on long petioles, which gives the plant an open habit. It can tolerate full sun, so could be used in an alpine garden or rockery but remember not to let it dry out. In our experience it grows slightly taller than 2" but as the leaves curve downwards it gives a flatter appearance.

We beg to differ and class this cultivar as a small as the plant mound can approach 10" tall, and certainly dwarfs our miniatures. However, the numerous variegated forms of [H. 'Blue Mouse Ears'](#), we class as miniature as they refuse to grow to the same size as the parent plant.

Naturally the measurements are a near approximation and actual dimensions of a plant can vary greatly upon the conditions and climate in which it is growing. As a consequence, if the AHS lists a cultivar as miniature, we use the following note to point this out: **AHS✓**. Hopefully, this helps draw attention to the expected size of the plant without confusion.

#### **Fun with the minis**

Back in April I featured some great growing small cultivars and how versatile they are, and so are the miniature varieties.

I had to get inventive with early spring displays some years when the weather held up emergence.



### [Hosta 'Gold Drop'](#)



A terrific cultivar with 3" x 2" heart-shaped leaves, which get brighter as the season progresses, especially in more light. It is supposed to be sun tolerant but the leaves are quite fleshy so would need more moisture if grown in more sun. Occasionally it can look like the colour is bleaching from the leaves. If this happens feed it with a gentle seaweed extract to supplement the photosynthesis process. We used to find this happened more when we had polythene tunnels possibly due to the plant lacking the full spectrum of light required for optimum photosynthesis.

This delightful mini has produced many notable sports, such as [H. 'Abby'](#) (and in turn [H. 'Amy Elizabeth'](#)) and [H. 'Forest Shadows'](#), all of which were featured in the April newsletter.

### [Hosta 'Paradise Puppet'](#)



Another cultivar I have used extensively in displays. It is a rapid grower and clearly shows its [H. venusta](#) parentage with its dark green leaves and satiny texture. In the case of this hybrid, the 3" x 1" leaves are narrower and longer, with a twist to the tip. It is also a much more reliable grower than the species parent. The root system is slightly stoloniferous, which means it spreads for good ground cover. It's another very useful miniature to use as a companion with other hostas – see opposite.

At Harrogate and Malvern shows, back in 2016 (click on the photo above to watch a video of the display), a prolonged cold snap stopped the hostas as they emerged, putting them in stasis for several weeks. Despite the artificial environments of the Pavilion at Harrogate and the Floral Marquee at Malvern they still flatly refused to unfurl. However, I had planned to use the concept of displaying pots on metal staging, such as step ladders, to deter slugs and snails getting to them. The lack of foliage helped show off the idea to great effect.

### **Great combinations**

I always enjoyed experimenting with unusual and exciting new ways to exhibit hostas, and is something I would encourage you to do because they are very amenable to being swapped in around in pots.

The photo below shows several miniature varieties altogether in one pot:



This pot contains [H. 'Kabitan'](#), a more upright small cultivar underplanted with *H. 'Slim and Trim'*, *H. 'Paradise Puppet'* and *H. 'Small Parts'*. Naturally this arrangement would need attention each spring to avoid congestion but it shows how



*Hosta* 'Red Cadet'



This delightful cultivar has quite large leaves for its diminutive size at 3" long x 2" wide. The colour of the blue-green leaves changes during the season and can almost appear turquoise blue-green in some light. The bloom remains throughout the season giving the leaves a matt appearance. Although you can just about see the red petioles underneath the leaf canopy, when you elevate the plant you can clearly see them, which makes this a great hosta for a hanging basket. These photos were taken at Gardeners' World in 2019 and it got a lot of attention for the unusual colour combination.



Customers often report that they need to find smaller plants for their pots, as they so quickly out grow them. Next time you find yourself in that position, why not get creative with some miniatures?

Happy experimenting

Team Mickfield Hostas

you can put hostas of a similar size together.

I have used *H.* 'Slim and Trim' extensively to underplant other varieties. Here it is under *H.* 'Whirligig':



*Hosta* 'Slim and Trim' underneath *H.* 'Kisuji'...



...and again underneath *H.* 'June Fever':

