



MICKFIELD HOSTAS



Spring is here!

I couldn't resist heading outside yesterday, in a wind chill of -12 degrees, for a second go at a nursery update video. The previous attempt looked like icing sugar on the top of a victoria sponge in comparison - I hope you enjoy the footage.

Nursery update

I always start each newsletter by reflecting on the previous month and laughed out loud at my suggestion that we might have seen signs of spring around the nursery. I am really glad the plants have yet to surface because the early shoots would have been severely damaged by the sudden change in weather. Given how benign the weather has been up until now, I would have expected more shoot emergence but, as we do not force our plants, there is only a handful of early emerging varieties in evidence. I suspect we will be showing asparagus at Harrogate once again!



If we dare say "with spring on the way", time to look at great cultivars for a splash of spring colour, so this month



Snowy Mickfield - Take 1

There are two videos for you to view this month - just click on the images to view the most snow we have had in years...



Snowy Mickfield - Take 2

Hosta 'Fortunei Albopicta'

This month we feature an older cultivar;

Hosta 'Fortunei Albopicta',

which we feel has been overlooked for years but is such a great plant for mixed planting borders. The true value of this cultivar is in its spring variegation, which can often remain into summer if grown in deep shade. Spring variegation, which disappears

we feature an old favourite: *Hosta 'Fortunei Albopicta'* - see side column for more...

Xylella fastidiosa

Although the weather presents a serious halt in our seasonal preparations, we feel a much more serious matter needs to be shared this month: *Xylella fastidiosa*, and mitigating the risk to the UK horticultural industry.

For those of you who are not aware of the latest disease to be causing widespread concern among horticulturalists, the RHS have a [leaflet](#) on their website, which links to the [DEFRA directive](#) aiming at preventing the spread of *Xylella fastidiosa* to the UK. Public awareness needs to be raised about the serious nature of this latest disease, and ways in which we can all act to prevent it entering the UK.

Although *Hosta* have not been identified as a host, or at risk, we still have a role to play in helping the rest of the industry combat the spread of disease.

As a consequence we would like to ask you not to send in the post or bring us directly, any live plant material you would like us to identify/diagnose. It is especially important that you do not bring any plant material to a show.

If the disease was to be found at a show, every nursery exhibitor would be affected and, although destruction of host plants only is specified, caution would suggest that all plant material be destroyed. This is the more likely scenario as the list of host plants is growing.

Please spread the word and if you have an issue with a plant, which you would like us to help you with - take photos, even if it is just to identify the cultivar. Prevention is always preferable to cure but in this matter, the cure could potentially damage UK horticulture for many years to come. Vigilance is the key to preventing further spread, so we urge you to follow up the recommendations outlined in the directive and make sure you protect yourselves by knowing the origins of the plants you buy for your own garden.

Next month we look forward to the start of the show season, whatever the weather, whether we like it or not!

Team Mickfield Hostas

as the season progresses, sometimes completely to a plain green leaf, is called viridescence.

Viridescence is a highly desirable characteristic if you are looking for early spring colour to brighten a border before all the summer flowering shrubs come into their glory. By gradually turning green they then act as a great foil for the rich colours of summer and into autumn.

Hosta 'Fortunei Albopicta' is a reliable grower and quickly re-establishes when divided. As the cultivar matures the leaves develop a slightly rippled margin, which adds to the filigree effect of the spring colouring - delightful.

As the season progresses, the leaf centres gradually turn greener, so you eventually lose the variegation but if the plant is situated in deep shade the variegation takes longer to leave and by the autumn it is much more subtle - but still there. Other viridescent varieties have put *H. 'Fortunei Albopicta'* somewhat in the shade over recent years but this is still an excellent choice, and reliably produces the goods year on year, whereas some its more modern rivals can be a little temperamental.

