



Yuppie Hostas

By Doctor Bob Olson

Hostas have become hot in the past couple of years. Probably because our ever faster pace of life cuts into the discretionary time available for gardening. Only the truly dedicated will now suffer the agony of growing hybrid roses with their demands for a fastidious environment and constant protection from insects and fungus (usually requiring lots of labor-intensive care in addition to dangerous chemicals). The same

might be said of the so many other gorgeous perennial flowers—they are a lot of headaches. Hostas on the other hand are relatively carefree and therefore appeal to Yuppies. They are the ideal Yuppie plant: they have a complicated nomenclature system, they come from Japan, they require almost no care and they are very expensive. What more could Yuppies (and TGOA/MGCA members) ask for?

Fortunately, some of us got into hostas years ago before they were discovered and learned some things about them that may save some time, headache and money.

First, don't buy the latest hostas: they are overpriced to say the least (how many one-crown plants are really worth \$250, particularly when you know you should be able to get it for \$25 in three or four years). Let those Yuppies buy the latest hostas so you can go to their gardens see if you really like them.

Second, don't buy a plant you haven't personally seen and greatly admired: The hype in the catalogues and brochures is worthy of the best of Madison Avenue (or the worst from a used car salesman). Several of us have yielded to the temptations to buy an attractive sounding name and description—they sound particularly attractive in January when the new catalogues come out and our sales resistance is weakest. Usually it is a very expensive disappointment. Despite these come-ons there are just so many possible variations-on-a-theme of color and pattern, and if you are a novice you probably won't be able to tell the new wonder plant from several others you already have. If you are an expert you probably will be able to tell it from the others, but find it isn't as good as the old standard varieties. Its better to see it first, but those catalogues can be quite compelling.

Third, never pay over \$25 for a hosta, and hopefully you will make \$25 the rare exception. At the national hosta convention two years ago, my wife and I were asked to write up one of the gardens for the American Hosta Society Journal coverage of convention gardens. The garden we were assigned was wonderful and remarkable. It was wonderful for the innovative and novel way of using what was already there, the

existing ancient shrubs and trees, while incorporating a marvelous variety of carefully selected and placed hostas and companion shade plants (all were wonderfully grown). It was remarkable because she hadn't paid over \$15 for anything in her garden-and here it was one of the finer ones on the national garden tour of the hosta society. Now it must be noted that she had made some shrewd trades starting with a lucky find at a plant sale and an auction purchase that was artfully engineered, but nonetheless she ended up with many undeniably premium plants on a shoestring budget. You can do the same, probably even better. There are some terrific deals from time to time at our spring auctions/sales and the members of most clubs are very generous (and not particularly shrewd) traders of one plant for another-they seem more interested in seeing that others get good varieties of plants than anything else.

Finally, if all this fails just come over to my house and talk to my wife. She will make me give up one of the excess plants hanging around in pots looking for a spot in the garden, if you can convince her you will give an orphan hosta a good home (no deer in the neighborhood). Of course there is no free lunch in this world, so to get the plant you will have to take the obligatory tour of the garden

Doctor Bob Olson is a member of the Mens Garden Club of Minneapolis. He is the past president of the National Hosta Society.

The TGOA/MGCA national web site thanks the author for submitting this article on March 20, 2000. Tracking number: WSP2000032000004