

NEW HOSTAS FOR 2015
Sandy Welches, Editor, MGV '05

Editors' note: unless otherwise stated, all photos are credited to Doug Beilstein.

We are very fortunate to have a first-class Hosta breeder just a few short hours from Cleveland. Doug Beilstein has been hybridizing Hostas for the past 20 years in his Mansfield trial gardens. The following story was written in *The Ohio Gardener* in the May/June issue and was penned and photographed by Teresa Woodward. Parts of that story are reprinted here.

“HOSTAS: The Next Generation: The newest hosta cultivars are anything but ho-hum. Here are some hostas to lust after in 2015.”

Hostas, the perennial darling of the 80's, have been divided and divided and shared and shared so many times that many gardeners have grown weary of the “friendship plants.” As the title says, this new generation of Beilstein hostas is exciting to behold. Doug, past president of the American Hosta Society, has been crossing and trialing thousands of hostas for the past 20 years. A recent visit to the dentist-turned-hosta-breeder's garden turned up several new cultivars in his personal collection of 1,200 named hostas.

Big and Blue

According to Beilstein, hosta breeders are producing more dynamic blue colors. “We have some powder blues that just knock your socks off.”



says Beilstein as he points out ‘Jet Stream,’ a powder blue hosta that turns dark black-green later in the season; ‘Blue Tooth,’ a blue hosta with canine tooth-shaped leaves; and ‘Smoky Mountain,’ a smoky blue hosta with corrugated leaves.



Red Petioles

A host of hostas now sport red petioles (stalks attaching leaf blades to stems). For Beilstein's ‘Granny Rouge’ and another popular one, ‘Designer Jeans,’ yellow leaves emerge brilliant gold in spring and contrast nicely with their bright, rhubarb red petioles.



Granny Rouge

Wrinkled and Contorted

For gardeners who crave hostas' textured leaves, the next generation takes texture contortions to the extreme with deeply-cupped, heavily ribbed and highly corrugated, puckered, ruffled and crinkled variations. ‘Leaping Lizard’ is one such plant in Beilstein's garden. And as the name implies, its uniquely shaped leaves have a reptile-like texture. ‘Pebble Creek’ is another one with its highly puckered, folded, reverse-cupped, contorted, lime-colored leaves.

continued on page 6

Morphing through the season

Hosta aficionados are familiar with hostas' color changes in different seasons and light conditions. Some hostas, like that all-time favorite 'Guardian Angel,' are even selected for their chameleon-like qualities. Doug's new introduction, 'Transformer,' is light green in the spring and is two-toned to solid dark green after flowering in mid-July.



Sturdy and Enduring

Most important, today's hostas are bred to last. "A lot of the early hostas were quite flimsy, and slugs attacked them, making them look pretty bad by mid-August," says Beilstein. "Our goal is a more durable, firmer, bug-resistant plant that comes up in late April and lasts until the first frost in October."



Doug was first introduced to hostas during a high school summer job working alongside AHS founder Dr. Raymond Allen at Kingswood Center in Mansfield, Ohio. Later, he started raising them as he began selling annuals and perennials as supplemental income for his blueberry farm. He says he ended up at Van Wade's hosta farm in nearby Bellville, Ohio.

"He showed me how to divide them, and they sold like hotcakes," says Beilstein. Doug explains that he kept returning to Wade's nursery to purchase more hostas—even some rather expensive ones. Out of curi-

osity and thriftiness, Doug decided to try to save seeds from some of the pricier ones. He says he learned several early lessons about open pollination and studied to learn more about crossing hostas.

Today, Beilstein has a sophisticated system for hybridizing new cultivars. The six-year process begins with his planting 60,000 seeds in November in his basement. By January, he selects 2,500 seedlings to keep — usually the most promising six of each cross. In March, he narrows the number of transplants to 1,500 and places them in larger trays for the roots to grow. By late May, he plants 1,000 to 1,500 of the transplants outside in a narrow two-year trial bed.

After two years, he culls 80 percent of the plants and trials them for another two years. After the fourth year, he'll cull more plants and rotate them to another bed for two more years of evaluation before making his final selections. "You may get two to four plants at the end of the six-year process," he says. That's two to four plants from 60,000 seeds.



The time-consuming process is a labor of love for Beilstein. "The most gratifying thing to me is to see the plants in other people's gardens," he says, especial-

ly on garden tours surrounding the American Hosta Society's annual convention.

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