

PLANT CORNER

Welcome to another year of the Plant Corner, a series of profiles of STAR PERFORMERS among perennial garden plants from the folks at Chaska Farm & Garden.



Hosta 'Popcorn'

April is time to clean up the garden. What was beautiful last year is crushed by the winter's snow and lies oppressively atop this year's succulent, emerging growth. The careful gardener tiptoes gingerly and tugs gently at dead brush to save tender new shoots. Late comers like Hostas can be very vulnerable to trampling feet. Just as Hosta pips emerge and before they are visible a misstep will cause this year's leaves to be crumpled and misshapen. When the leaves are the show, particularly with Hostas, that is a big disappointment. We do love our Hostas and rightly so. They tolerate shade, though specific varieties take all but full sun. They have minimal need for water or maintenance. Hostas suppress weeds because little can thrive under their dense leaf canopy. The variety that Hostas now offer is extremely broad. Their size can be only a few inches to nearly 3 feet, and that is only the leaf height. The leaf color range from yellow to steely blue along with variegations and stripings make them stately garden plants and often a plant collector's dream.

Chaska Farm & Garden will offer about 300 varieties this year, so to pick one to feature is difficult. Maybe it's the name (no small point) but 'Popcorn' does stand out as a very lovely and useful small Hosta. Its rounded leaves are bright yellow, which fades to cream as summer progresses, surrounded by a broad blue border. With a few years to mature the leaves acquire an interesting cupped shape. Lavender flowers in mid-summer are a nice bonus but the all-summer leaf display pays the rent. Use 'Popcorn' as a specimen plant or at the front of a border where its small stature and bright color will be noticed. We are now seeing Hostas used in containers and trough gardens, and 'Popcorn' would be a good choice for both leaf color and texture.

Need a few other new Hostas to try this year? Try the two minis: 'X-rated' with its grass-blade thin, white centered leaves, and 'Teeny-weeny Bikini' with its yellow striped leaves. Two new blue Hostas, 'Pewterware' and 'PrairieSky' are standouts (keep blues out of intense sun to hold that color best). We also like the large and majestic 'Miss Tokyo' for its large rounded leaf with a wide cream margin. From mini to jumbo, Hostas are versatile and very trouble-free.

- Tom