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The HOSTA ONLINE JOURNAL

Hosta Collecting in Japan

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Although I was born and grew up in Japan, while I lived there I had never seen or heard of a plant called giboshi, or hosta in English. One year when I was back at home visiting my parents, I spotted a familiar green and white plant in my father's garden. That was the first time I heard the name giboshi. Since that day I have made friends with Japanese hosta collectors on the Internet, and have been learning about hostas in Japan. In this article I would like to share some of what I've learned about the Japanese hosta scene with my many friends in the American Hosta Society.



What Do They Collect?



Japan is smaller than the state of California with a population of a little more than CA, TX, NY, FL, IL & PA combined. Because the gardening space there is limited, many collectors prefer smaller varieties, or they keep the plants small and grow them in containers. The Japanese people have developed and enjoyed their own style of gardening, using all sorts of containers, for hundreds of years. Those who are lucky enough to have a larger gardening space seem to prefer to plant western cultivars just like most of us in the West. Although a commonly used Japanese word for hosta is giboshi, these Western cultivars are often called "hosuta" to distinguish from Japanese varieties. The word hosuta means, of course, hosta with a "Japanese accent."

Hosta/giboshi collecting in Japan takes on several different forms. Some people collect hosuta, or Western cultivars. Most hosta species are of course native to Japan. Some collectors go out in the field and look for special forms of the native hostas to add to their collections. One of my hosta friends, Kondo-san, took this photo of a wild hosta sport (Figure 1) on Mt. Izumigatake near Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture.

There are some collectors who collect all hosta species, and some collect only different varieties of *H. longipes*, or Iwa Giboshi in Japanese. Japanese collectors also take pride in possessing rare and unusual hostas of all types.



Hostas Found in the Wild

The picture in Figure 2 was taken in the area where *H. 'Kozasa Nishiki'* (Figure 3) was found. Different species grow in different environments – some grow near water around rivers and swamps, some in flat fields, while others find a little dirt in cracks and cling on mountain sides.

Many of my Japanese friends say they have visited natural habitats of hosta. Do not expect, however, that your dream hosta may be easily found along the side of a road. You'd have to search deep in the mountain regions, high up rock walls, or climbing down



cliffs with a rope to find some of these amazing gems of nature.
The picture in Figure 4 was taken in Kochi Prefecture, Shikoku Island, where *H.*

kikutii var. polyneuron grows wild. The variegated *H. kikutii var. polyneuron* in Figure 5 is one of the wild hostas collected in Kochi Prefecture.



Rare and Unusual Hostas

When we talk about rare and unusual giboshi, I have to bring up rasha or rasha-ba (rasha leaf) hostas first. Rasha is a thick felt-like woolen cloth. Rasha-ba then is a thick and tough leaf with uneven texture like rasha cloth. Once I asked the renowned hosta expert W. George Schmid if there is an English word for this leaf form. This is what he wrote back to me: "I would describe this leaf as a 'uniquely contorted leaf with an unevenly knotty and knurled surface texture.' So much for the 'simple' English language." I think it's best if we just use rasha for these types. They are very rarely found in the wild and highly prized by collectors.



The photos below show some examples of rasha-ba hostas:



Three different rasha-ba giboshi (Figure 6): the large one in the back is *H.* 'Hyuga Rasha', originally collected in the wild, and the two small ones are hybrids (the right one is *H.* 'Gonokami-no-kongou' as shown in Figure 7); *H.* 'Gonokami-no-kongou' (Figure 7); A 3-year-old seedling with variegated rasha-ba. (Figure 8)

There is also an unusual multi-flower form called kodakara-saki (Figure 9), that many Japanese giboshi collectors are dying for. Again, according to W. George Schmid, there are no English words to describe this "monstrosity." The photo is *H.* 'Bukou Homare'.

Here are some more photos of very unusual giboshi, or wild-collected hosta sports, from my friends' collections:



'Tamaryu'



'Uzu-no-mai' sport



'Ooshimajishi'



'Ryujinkyō'



'Tsurugi-no-mai'



'Tsurugi-no-mai' leaf



**Tosayama sport
'Kagami Nishiki'**



**unnamed Tosayama
sport**



**Tosayama collector
Yamaoka-san**

Mark Zilis wrote in his book, *The Hostapedia* (p. 960), that "(Tosayama Giboshi is) considered to be a species by some hosta collectors (Sugita 1991)."

Tosayama Giboshi is said to be the smallest hosta species and found in the wild only on Tosayama (Tosa Mountain), Shikoku Island. In Figure 10, H. 'Hoshun', a Tosayama, is planted by collector Yamaoka-san inside a hollowed piece of volcanic rock. Isn't it cute?



**Tosayama sport
'Hoshun'**



Hosta Shows

Hosta shows are usually held in the spring and early summer at many different locations throughout Japan. These shows are often sponsored by hosta/giboshi societies, nurseries, and even sometimes by a group of wild plant collectors. Please don't think the term "wild plants" means simply weeds. Japan is blessed with many beautiful and useful native plants and flowers in addition to hostas, and collectors prize unusual forms and mutations of many different genera. These shows are a good opportunity for the collectors to show off their collections as well as educating the general public about hostas, and even to share their extra plants. Hard-to-find collector hostas can often be found for sale at the shows. A hosta show is also a meeting place for people with similar interests, where they can exchange information and to expand the network of hosta friends.

Let's take a look at some pictures from hosta shows:



Hosta Show #1 - sponsored by the Japan Hosta Society



**kikutii. var. caput-avis
sport**



'Kifukurin Urajiro Hyuga'



kikutii var. kikutii



**'Domaine de Courson' and
'Niagara Falls'**

Do a few of these hostas look somewhat familiar? If your answer is "yes," you are correct - these are hosuta (Western hostas) in this show. How do you like the Western cultivars presented in Japanese style?



'Elegans'



'Cherry Berry'

Hosta Show #2 - The Chichibu Iwa Giboshi Preservation Society



longipes displays



Some *longipes* sports



Giboshi for sale at show



'Akabira Homare'

At the Chichibu Iwa Giboshi show all plants are beautifully displayed in decorative pots filled with the pebble material seen on top. This is how most collectors grow their plants.

Single plant photos are file photos from the Chichibu Iwa Giboshi Preservation Society.



'Bukou Maru'



'Chichibu no Hana'

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