

June 2009

## Plants of the Month

### Sunflowers

*Helianthus*

Stars in the edible landscape, the huge blooms of annual sunflowers produce seeds packed with nutrition. Iron content is second only to egg yolks and liver. Seeds from purely decorative sunflower varieties usually make seeds suitable for birds and wildlife, but for human consumption, raise an edible variety such as Mammoth. Reaching 6 feet with a heavy seed head, Mammoth benefits from staking and a booster fertilization when blooms appear. Harvest when the back turns yellow to yellow-green and bracts turn brown. Cut, leaving 1 foot of the stalk attached, and hang in a warm dry place until dry.



### Halcyon Blue hosta

*Hosta tardiana* 'Halcyon'

When days heat up, this hosta keeps its cool. Many blue hostas fade as the season progresses, but not Halcyon. It holds its intense blue. Add some icy whites and crisp deep green foliage and you have a soothing summer refuge. A medium size, Halcyon eventually spreads its deeply ribbed paddle-shaped leaves to about 2 1/2 feet wide. Pale lavender flowers reach 2 feet on sturdy stalks. Halcyon likes rich moist soil in semi-shade but puts up with less than ideal conditions. Other stellar qualities are slug resistance and being one of the last hostas to succumb to fall frosts.



## Japanese Hydrangea Vine

*Schizophragma hydrangeoides*

Patience pays off when you plant this spectacular Asian vine. In early summer, its paddle-shaped pure white sepals surround tiny true flowers in showy 8-10" clusters similar to a lacecap hydrangea. Growing slowly up to 30 feet high and 6-9 feet wide, it attaches to vertical surfaces such as brick walls or lattice by adhesive rootlets. The toothed heart-shaped leaves stay clean and pest free throughout the summer. In autumn, they turn yellow and fall, revealing the reddish brown woody stems. These provide some interest over the winter. Plant in rich, moderately moist soil in full to part shade.



---

## Swiss Chard

*Beta vulgaris var cicla*

Commonly known as Swiss Chard, chard is a hardy, attractive, nutritious vegetable, largely overlooked by the home gardener. Requiring only about 5 hours of sunlight daily and able to withstand light freezing, chard can be grown where other vegetables would suffer. Chard is also a light feeder, requiring only one or two light feedings during the 55-60 days it takes to mature from seed. Eight to ten inch leaves can be harvested as they develop, or the entire mature plant can be cut 1 ½ inches above the ground. Swiss chard is an excellent ornamental addition to your landscape, too.

