

# The Hostas of the Famous German Plantsmen Arends, Foerster and Pagels

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Georg Arends, Karl Foerster and Ernst Pagels were important German gardeners in the 20th century. All three plantsmen grew a lot of new cultivars of various plant genera. And they grew some new hostas, too.

The nursery of Georg Arends (1863-1952) in Wuppertal (east of Düsseldorf, West Germany) still exists and is now being run by his great granddaughter Anja Maubach. Arends is well-known for his astilbes, azalaeas, phloxes and primulas.

In his autobiography (*Mein Leben als Gärtner und Züchter*, published in 1951), Georg Arends describes his work with *Hosta* (cf. Fischer 1984 in *The American Hosta Society Bulletin*). First, he crossed the steel-blue but a little weak and low-growing *Hosta fortunei* (now known as *H. 'Fortunei'*) with the strong-growing blue-green *Hosta sieboldiana*. After making a selection from many seedlings, he got the vigorous *H. fortunei* 'Robusta' (now known as *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans') and offered it from 1905 on.

Systematics and nomenclature have changed since the days of Georg Arends. However, according to Diana Grenfell's book *Hosta: The Flowering Foliage Plant* (1990, p. 46), Arends' *H. fortunei* is in fact *H. 'Tokudama'*.



Above: Arends' Nursery today, and  
below, hostas on display at the nursery



Above: A label at the Arends' Nursery and  
below, a young *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans' from  
Eurohosta





Mark Zilis (*The Hostapedia*, 2009, pp. 99-101) writes that *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans' is one of the few hostas that is a cultivar but not a clone. That is because many nurseries used the seeds for propagation instead of dividing. Seedlings with blue-green foliage were offered as *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans' while the others were discarded or sold as *H. sieboldiana*.

Arends also worked with *H. minor* 'Alba' (now called *H. sieboldii* 'Alba') and tried to get specimens with larger white flowers. By crossing with *H. coerulea* (*ovata*), (correct name *H. ventricosa*) he got a more vigorous form which he called "verbesserte *minor* Alba" (= improved *H. sieboldii* 'Alba').

In Arends' area, *H. 'Tardiflora'* flowered very late, so the flowers were often spoiled by early autumn freezes. Arends crossed *H. 'Tardiflora'* with *H. coerulea ovata* (= *H. ventricosa*). In 1911 he presented the new *H. tardiflora* 'Hybrida' (now called *H. 'Tardiflora Hybrida'* (Ruh-P., 1992) with an earlier flowering period as a result of his efforts.

By selection, Arends found his fourth hosta, *H. ovata* 'Superba' (= *H. ventricosa* 'Superba'). It has darker flowers and was offered from 1933 on.

Arends' *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans' is still one of the most popular hostas. The other three hostas are of little or no significance in today's hosta trade. However, the history of the four hostas illustrates how careful Georg Arends was in his work as a nursery owner and hosta breeder.

Dr Karl Foerster (1874-1970) is the most famous German gardener. He was not only a gifted plantsman, but also a talented author of articles and books on garden plants and gardening. His nursery at Potsdam-Bornim (south-west of Berlin, East Germany) is still operating.

Karl Foerster focused his work as a breeder on *Aster*, *Delphinium*, *Phlox* and several genera other than *Hosta*. However, he did a lot to raise the profile of hostas in Germany. Since he also worked as a landscape architect, Foerster paid great attention to the question of which plant would agree with another plant in a good-looking garden. For example, in his book *Einzug der Gräser und Farne in die Gärten* (published in 1956), he suggested to combining hostas with ferns and grasses and compared this combination with kettledrum (i.e., hostas) and harp (i.e., ferns and grasses).

But in his book *Gartenfreude wie noch nie* (1937), Karl Foerster criticized certain annoying forms of hostas, saying that these would fit well in shop windows of butcheries rather than in an elaborate garden design. In an article published in 1957 ("Die vierzehn Ideal-Funkien"), he distinguished noble hostas from boring hostas, unfortunately without listing the hosta names he was talking about.

Dr. Konrad Naeser was a former employee of Karl Foerster and in an article published in the German Journal *Zandera* in 2000, he explains how Foerster worked as a breeder: Foerster made careful and long observations of new cultivars before offering them in his nursery. He wanted to find plants that were easy to grow and not difficult to propagate. They should be affordable by as many people as possible.



On the other hand, Foerster respected the "inner harmony" of a plant (cultivar) and refused any overstatement of certain features of a plant, although this could be a customer's wish.

Karl Foerster's House in Bornim near Potsdam dating back to 1912 and is famous for its naturalistic planting and sunken gardens

*Foerster, known for his versatility as a hybridiser of several plant genera, as a prolific writer and landscape architect*



## Philipp Franz von Siebold's Home Country has fascinating hosta history

There is only one hosta that is linked to Karl Foerster: *H. sieboldiana* 'Semperaurea'. The history of this hosta is still mysterious because no data could be found on how and when it came to Karl Foerster (cf. articles by Ullrich Fischer and Marlene Ahlburg published in the *British Hosta and Hemerocallis Society Bulletin* in 1983 and 1984, respectively).

Peter and Jean Ruh registered *H.* 'Semperaurea' at the AHS in 2003 (corrections in 2018), saying that it originates from Japan and that Karl Foerster gave the name and introduced it. Some sources, like Diana Grenfell in *Hosta: The Flowering Foliage Plant* (1990, p. 121) and Schmid in *The Genus Hosta* (1991, p. 96) assume that it came in the 1930s to Germany. However, there is no valid proof for this assumption. Karl Foerster mentioned it in his 1952 catalogue as *Hosta grandiflora semperaurea* and under its German name 'Dauergoldfunkie' for the first time. In his 1965/1966 catalogue, he regarded it as "irreplaceable". Nevertheless, it is now difficult to get a specimen of this lutescent hosta.

Like *H. sieboldiana* 'Elegans', *H.* 'Semperaurea' produces fertile seeds (top right photo). The seedlings look very much like the parent plant. Since nurseries sold these seedlings, it is obvious that there is more than just one clone of this cultivar. A descendant of *H.* 'Semperaurea' is *H.* 'Apple Court Gold' (NR) from D. Grenfell and R. Grounds. It is considered very rare in the UK.

Ernst Pagels (1913-2007) worked in Karl Foerster's nursery for some time before he established his own business in Leer (Northwest Germany). Unfortunately, Pagels could not find a successor for his nursery. So it was shut down. The area is now a public park with old glass houses, etc. (middle photo). Pagels did not consider himself a breeder or a hybridiser. He was an excellent observer who selected what nature offered him. He was strictly against tissue culture and never wanted to get licenses for his cultivars since he thought that this would make his plants too expensive for many people.

Famous for some widely distributed flowers like *Rodgersia* and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Ostfriesland', Ernst Pagels is also well known for his cultivars of *Miscanthus sinensis*. *Hosta* was not an important genus for Ernst Pagels. He only raised *Hosta* 'Bianca' by selection from *H. sieboldii* 'Alba'. It is a small hosta with green leaves and white flowers. Sandra Bond writes in her book *Hostas* (1992, p. 89) that *H.* 'Bianca' (lowermost photo) has larger white flowers and has a more vigorous habit than the original form. Despite the fact that *H.* 'Bianca' is not a very spectacular cultivar, it is still available in some German nurseries.

How would these three eminent plantsmen judge the huge number and variety in colours, forms and sizes of today's hostas? What would they think about the hosta trade? Maybe they would shake their heads. Or they would just shrug and carry on with their work. Who knows? But certainly, Karl Foerster would write about it.

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