

Hosta 'Schwan' (NR) - A German *Hosta* in Britain

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This is the British-German story of a medium-sized *Hosta* with green leaves, a green scape, and white flowers called *Hosta* 'Schwan' (NR). Normally, such a *Hosta* would hardly be the subject of an article in the BHHS journal. But some circumstances make *H.* 'Schwan' special.

Some years ago, the German Hardy Plant Society (GdS, or Gesellschaft der Staudenfreunde in German) started a project to record all of the German hostas (see the article by Thomas and Christa Hülsmann in the Bulletin of the BHHS 2015). In the course of that study, some cultivars proved to be fairly obscure. Neither the origin nor the originators, nominants, or introducers of these hostas are known. *Hosta* 'Schwan' is one of them. That really piqued my interest.

First, I did some research on the internet. Hugo Philips, in his outstanding database MyHostas, writes that *H.* 'Schwan' is a German plant of unknown origin that reaches a height of 60 cm (23.6 in.). It has green lanceolate leaves and white fragrant flowers with a flowering period from August to September. He told me that he had taken the information from an old internet catalogue of the Zillmer nursery in Uchte near Hannover (Lower Saxony, Germany).



Hosta 'Schwan' is not mentioned in the excellent Hostalibrary.org, but there is a photo on the website of the quite useful 'The Hosta Helper' from PlantsGalore.com showing a hosta called 'Schwan' with white-edged green leaves, accompanied with some descriptions mainly based on the photo. Consequently, I had two different hostas, both with the same name. But which one is the 'true' *Hosta* 'Schwan', and what is the other one? Last, but not least: Where can I get specimens of *H.* 'Schwan'?

I found a few German nurseries that had listed *H.* 'Schwan' in stock, but they do not offer it any longer for various reasons. When asked, one nursery replied that originally they had obtained it from Zillmer's nursery. The owner of Zillmer's told me that about 20 years ago her company may have had such a hosta. Then I discovered another *Hosta* 'Schwan' on the website of a German plants shop with 'extraordinary white' flowers and green leaves with white edges. That is the *H.* 'Schwan' which is shown on the website of The Hosta Helper. Unfortunately, it is out of stock, too, and will not be back for sale. However, I could get a specimen from a friend who had ordered it before. In fact, that hosta proved to have mostly white to very light lavender flowers.



Photos from top left to lower right:
A newly potted *H.* 'Schwan', a flower scape with pods forming and a faded bloom of the same hosta

*'Schwan' - An
Intriguing hosta
found in Scotland*

I bought another *Hosta* 'Schwan' from an Austrian nursery, which has closed in the meantime. The plant has green leaves with cream edges and light purple flowers. Obviously, both *H.* 'Schwan' are different from each other and also from that of the *hosta* described in Hugo Philips' database.

Finally, I discovered a Scottish nursery located near Edinburgh that still offers *Hosta* 'Schwan'. The description of it agrees well with the details given by Hugo Philips and Zillmer, although no fragrance was noted by the nursery. Moreover, the owner of the nursery, Billy Carruthers, told me that he had obtained that *Hosta* from Zillmer several years ago (when at least some things like plant imports were much easier). So it seems that this is THE *Hosta* 'Schwan'. There are very good reasons to assume that it was introduced into the market by the Zillmer Nursery. It may also be the place where it originated.

Unfortunately, due to the expense caused by all the new valid and official rules on plant imports, etc., the Scottish nursery could not send that *hosta* to an European address. Understandable, but a pity.

Eventually, in spring 2024, three *Hosta* 'Schwan' made their way from Scotland to an English address for the auction of the 2024 AGM of the BHHS. So at least some members do have this German *hosta* in their British garden while it is still not available in its native country.

But what about the other *Hosta* 'Schwan'? Well, that's another story.

Note: I am grateful to June Colley VMM for improving the English of this text.

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