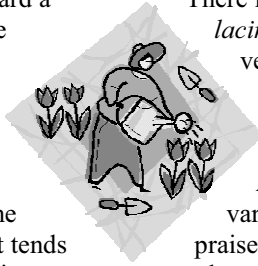


Cotswold Cottage Gardening

Various Thoughts on Variegation

Opinions vary about variegated plants. Some gardeners reject the whole tribe out of hand, saying that they look diseased or underfed; their supporters regard a stripy or blotched leaf as more exciting than any flower. Personally I find them, like so many of the good things in life, best in moderation. On the whole, white variegation appeals more to me than yellow, maybe because it tends to make a purer and more distinct contrast (and many white-variegated plants have white flowers, which creates a particularly harmonious effect). Three-way variegation is banned from my garden, the effect being just too hectic (and generally internally clashing).



seedlings will be plain; you must grow extras from hardwood cuttings, which root easily in sandy compost in October.

There is an excessively dotty form *S.f.*

laciniata ‘Pulverentissima’ with very thin leaves that seem to have been dusted, the charitable would say with snow. This is a step too far for me.

Amongst the evergreens, variegated ivies deserve particular praise. The two-colour leaves look much more elegant, and in the words of the dreaded cliché, do light up a dark corner where the plain sorts would be merely drab. The white and pale green ‘Eva’ and ‘White Knight’ look almost silver in some lights.

An Elegant Cornus

One of the best variegated shrubs for our conditions is *Cornus alba* ‘Elegantissima’. This is no less vigorous than the rather boring plain-leaved variety, and will spread quite widely once it is established; the outer portions can be detached easily and used for new plants. This cornus has red stems, which leaven the bare winter garden gloom rather more than evergreens; some people recommend stooling, to intensify the colour, but I have never found that it makes much difference. All this shrub asks is not to be too dry, but I have never had any trouble on our free-draining soil. I am also partial to the cream-splashed elder, *Sambucus nigra* ‘Albomarginata’. This again is as sturdy as the plain, and a lot less lumpen in the summer landscape. It flowers and fruits prolifically, but the

Honesty Pays

Hostas offer some of the most striking leaf patterns and combinations. Their large leaves seem to be able to carry off the stripes and streaks with panache. Unfortunately I have had to banish them, as I find the slug depredations so distressing. I have tried everything, from pellets (collateral casualties and need renewing too often) to growing in pots with Vaseline round the rim (can’t keep them watered enough) and copper rings (not bad, but only really for small plants). At Hadspen they have had great success with nematodes applied religiously for seven years. No such trouble with the variegated honesty, which thrives in similar positions, sows itself prolifically once established, and seems untroubled by pests of any sort a perfect plant, in leaf, flower and shining silver seed.

Elaine Hunt