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Counting the Cost

*Why are Some
Plants so Expensive?*

If you come to Behmerwald Nursery looking for a hosta you will have decisions to make. Some plants will cost twice as much as others, and at the moment they all look the same. An old adage warns: "You get what you pay for." Here are some thoughts on plant cost:

The Factors

In the plant world there is a large disparity in prices. Some plants are cheap; some plants are expensive. Here are the factors:

1. **Ease of production**
2. **Royalties**
3. **Quality**

Terms

Cultivar - Refers to a **cultivated variety**; a plant that is selected and grown from specially grown stock.

Hybrid - A plant that is created by crossing two plant species.

Variety - A naturally occurring plant variation that is selected.

Production - A plant that is easy to produce is normally a cheap plant. Just because it is easy to produce does not make it bad. In fact, many garden favorites are quite easy to produce. The danger lies in what that ease of production means in your landscape. Many invasive plants are easy to produce and can be bought cheaply. Unfortunately many exceptional plants are not easy to produce. In fact, quite a few take a full two years to reach a saleable size.

Royalties - Royalties are a common reason that plants are expensive. Plant breeders often spend years developing cultivars or hybrids that have exceptional traits. Some plants are disease resistant, some have more flowers, some bloom longer, some have a dwarf habit, and some have unique coloring. Regardless of which trait the breeder has targeted, most finished products are far superior to the old cultivars and species. For their work the breeder will get a royalty on every plant that is sold, and in many cases it is illegal to produce that plant without a license. The price is higher so that the people working to develop better plants are compensated.

Quality - It takes work to produce a healthy plant. Quality starts from the beginning, with the selection of good seeds or healthy cuttings. Throughout production care must be taken to ensure healthy growth. This means fertilizing correctly, pruning correctly, and watering correctly. The price of the plant reflects the work done to ensure a healthy plant.

So what does all this mean? It means that you get what you pay for. If you're buying daylilies you can spend a minimal amount and get a lily that literally flowers for a day or two, or you can pay a bit more and have flowers for four months by purchasing an everbloomer that was developed by a plant breeder. You can plant a Hosta that will revert to green and burn out in July, or you can plant a premium Hosta that will remain crisp and variegated through the entire season. When you're looking at plants use good judgment. Find out why they cost what they do before making a decision. Sure, the premium plants add up quickly, but they are a good investment. Sometimes you need to weigh the cost against the product.

Sources

This sheet has been compiled from experience and information from the Pennsylvania Certified Horticulturist Reference Guide