



Counting the Cost

It is common to see some cultivars of a plant species selling for higher costs than others. Sometimes a few plant species might be the same size, yet cost very different amounts. An old adage warns: "You get what you pay for." Why do plants cost what they do? And how can you tell if an expensive plant is worth the investment?

The Factors

1. Production
2. Royalties
3. Quality

Cultivar: A cultivated variety; a plant that is selected for a desirable trait and produced from specially grown stock.

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

Variety: A naturally occurring plant variation that is selected.

Trade Name: A registered name used for plant marketing.

Production - A plant that is easy to produce is normally a cheap plant. Just because a plant 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 very cheap because they are easy to produce, but they will become garden thugs. Many exceptional plants take considerable time and extra effort to produce, which is reflected in the cost.

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, pruning, and watering correctly. The price of the plant reflects the work done to ensure that it is healthy and hardy.

Conclusion

So what does all this mean? It means that you get what you pay for. If you're buying a daylily you can spend a minimal amount and get a lily that 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 with defined coloring and superior foliage quality. Use good judgment. Find out why plants 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 return.