

HOSTA

Hostas have become extremely popular and there are now several thousand cultivars to choose from. They are enjoyed for their lush, tropical looking leaves, which come in many sizes and a range of colours, for their usefulness as edging plants and as spectacular specimens. Hostas also produce blooms, sometimes fragrant, in shades of white to lavender-purple from early summer to very late fall, depending on selection. Each year brings many new and exciting hosta introductions to the market. Excellent companion plants include ferns, spring flowering bulbs, Dicentra, Astilbe, Pulmonaria, Heuchera, Lamium, Galium odoratum, Tiarellas and a myriad of flowering shrubs and trees, especially Japanese Maples.

Hostas are often thought of as shade plants, however, nothing will grow in total darkness. While hostas are shade tolerant, many grow quite well with a significant amount of direct sun. In general, the thicker the leaf, the more sun tolerant it will be. Most blue leaved varieties are very sun tolerant but the glaucous coating on the leaves, that gives them their blue colour, will burn off in the sun and leave you with green leaves. If a blue colour is what you desire, these hostas are best left in a more shaded location. Many gold leaved hostas will colour best in the sun. Light tolerance varies from cultivar to cultivar and sometimes it takes a little experimentation to locate a hosta in just the right spot. Ask for our separate list of sun tolerant hostas. Although many hostas are sun tolerant, it must be remembered that hostas are neither drought nor wind tolerant and soils must be kept adequately moist. It is best to water your hostas at the roots. Soaker hoses are a good long-term solution.

Assessing the type and degree of shade that you have will best determine which hosta cultivar will be most suitable for your planting site. There are several kinds of shade. The shade under the canopy of deciduous trees differs from the shade under a large conifer (evergreen) which again differs from the shade on the north side of a wall or fence. Dry shade is different from moist shade, and what is a sunny area in spring may become heavily shaded by mid-July. Study your planting site carefully and don't be afraid to move your hostas around; they are quite hardy.

Very often, hostas are used as a groundcover beneath large trees. It is important to remember that both the trees and the hostas are competing for the same soil moisture. Always keep the area well watered to help reduce competition.

The importance of soil structure, when planting, cannot be overemphasized. Although hostas are tolerant of a wide range of conditions, for optimum performance they prefer slightly acidic, moist, well-drained, fertile soil. This can be achieved by amending the top 12" (30cm) of soil with a mix of 4" (10cm) of decayed compost, well-aged manure, and peat moss. Both sandy soils and clay soils benefit greatly from the addition of organic matter. Organic matter will improve the moisture and nutrient retention of sandy soils and improve the drainage in clay soils. Top dressing the beds with organic matter every spring and fall will continue to nurture and enrich the soil, resulting in more vigorous and healthier plants.

Hostas are relatively maintenance free. The only real pests are snails and slugs. These can be controlled by a number of methods. Many people swear by broken eggshells sprinkled on the ground or beer left in saucers. Slug bait or pellets are available at Plant World. Please read and follow the directions carefully. The Ontario Hosta Society recommends hand picking as the best method of control. Another method involves spraying a solution of one part ammonia to ten parts of water directly onto the slugs. This spray is said to be quite effective but direct contact with the slug must be made. It is advisable to start in very early spring while the slugs are still nesting around the crown of the hosta. Spray into and around the crown, and to continue spraying throughout the season.

When purchasing new hostas, be aware that you are often seeing a very immature plant. It takes a minimum of 3 years for a hosta to reach maturity, both in leaf size and leaf colour. Some hostas, especially of the 'Tokudama' line, are extremely slow growing. As another example, Hosta 'Ginko Craig', which is a very small, variegated hosta for the first 3 years, then becomes a medium sized hosta with wider leaves in its fourth year. To maintain the original small size, divisions must be made.

The most common means of propagating hostas is by root and crown division. A sharp shovel driven through the centre of a large clump will sever it in two. This can be done right in the ground if you are dealing with a large plant. Smaller plants can be dug out and divided above ground. Smaller clumps can be divided with a sharp knife. Be sure there is at least one eye attached to a piece of the crown and roots. It is best not to make divisions too small.

Hostas are wonderful candidates for growing in containers. Many of the miniature hostas will do best this way. Hostas in containers can be moved around to suit your landscaping needs and varying light conditions. Being above the ground can keep them away from slugs and allows for the close-up enjoyment of many different cultivars. Container-grown plants must be fertilized regularly. Follow the directions of the fertilizer of your choice. The soil for containers ideally should be 80% soil-less mix and 20% soil, with the addition of some coarse grit for drainage. Hostas in containers must not be allowed to dry out. To over-winter hostas in containers, you can take them out of their pots and plant them directly into an unused area of the garden to be dug out again in the spring. Hostas can be left to over-winter in plastic containers if the containers are at least 12 inches across and are brought into an unheated garage or shed. They should go into the winter on the dry side. Snow can be added once or twice during the season to insulate them and add some moisture as the temperature rises.

We encourage you to discover the diversity of hostas available and invite you to experience the pleasures and rewards of growing them in your garden.

SUN TOLERANT HOSTAS: (Soil must be moisture retentive) Allan P. McConnell, August Moon, Celebration, Christmas Tree, Diamond Tiara, Emerald Tiara, Fall Bouquet, fortuneii 'Albopicta', fortuneii 'Aureomarginata', Francee, Fragrant Gold, Fringe Benefit, Ginko Craig, Gold Drop, Gold Edger, Golden Prayers, Grand Master, Grand Tiara, Green Fountain, Groundmaster, Honeybells, Knockout, Minuteman, nigrescens Elatior, Patriot, Piedmont Gold, plantaginea, Platinum Tiara, Regal Splendor, Royal Standard, September Sun, Shade Fanfare, sieboldiana 'Elegans', So Sweet, Spritzer, Stiletto, Sugar and Cream, Sum and Substance, undulata 'Albomarginata', undulata 'Mediovariegata', Vanilla Cream, ventricosa 'Aureomarginata', Zounds

SLUG RESISTANT HOSTAS - Most Hostas with thick leaves are slug resistant but it takes time to develop those leaves. Immature plants may not be as slug resistant. Blue Dimples, Blue Ice, Blue Mammoth, Big Daddy, Big Mama, Blue Angel, Blue Danube, Blue Shadows, Blue Wedgwood, Camelot, Canadian Shield, City Lights, Bright Glow, Dorset Blue, Fall Bouquet, Fire and Ice, Great Expectations, Hadspen Blue, Halcyon, Inniswood, June, Krossa Regal, Leather Sheen, Love Pat, Maruba Iwa, Northern Exposure, Osprey, Pizzazz, Queen Josephine, Sagae, Sea Lotus Leaf, sieboldiana 'Elegans', ventricosa, Fringe Benefit, Gold Drop, Gold Edger, Grand Master, Spritzer, Sum and Substance, tardiana species, tardiflora, Tokudama, Tokudama Aureomebulosa, Tokudama Flavocircularis, Vanilla Cream, Zounds

HOSTAS WITH FRAGRANT BLOOMS Emily Dickenson, Honeybells, Hyacinthina, Fragrant Blue, Fragrant Bouquet, Fragrant Gold, Fried Bananas, Fried Green Tomatoes, Guacamole, Honeybells, Hoosier Harmony, Invincible, Iron Gate cultivars, plantaginea, plantaginea 'Ming Treasure', plantaginea 'Aphrodite', Royal Standard, So Sweet, Sugar and Cream, Summer Fragrance, Sweet Susan,

BEST BLUES Big Daddy, Blue Angel, Blue Arrow, Blue Boy, Blue Cadet, Blue Dimples, Blue Ice, Blue Mammoth, Blue Moon, Blue Vision, Blue Wedgwood, Bressingham Blue, Buckshaw Blue, Dorset Blue, Hadspen Blue, Halcyon, Krossa Regal, Love Pat, sieboldiana 'Elegans', Tokudama, Wheaton Blue, Winfield Blue

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED Carnival, Daybreak, Fall Bouquet, Fire and Ice, Frosted Jade, Guacamole, Inniswood, June, Krossa Regal, Love Pat, Montana 'Aureomarginata', Moonlight, Northern Exposure, Pandora's Box, Patriot, Paul's Glory, plantaginea, Raspberry Sorbet, Regal Splendor, Sum and Substance, Sunpower, Tiara series