

GROWING HOSTAS

By Robert R. Westerfield, Extension Consumer Horticulturist, University of Georgia

Hostas are quickly becoming one of the most popular perennial plants grown in our landscapes. Sometimes referred to as plantain lilies, hostas are reliable plants for both shade and partial sun situations. Besides the wonderful foliage hostas produce, many display fragrant flowers from early summer to fall, depending on the cultivar. Flowers are trumpet-like in shape and may be white, lavender, bluish or bicolor. There are hundreds of hosta varieties from which to choose and more varieties become available each year. Leaf color may vary from shades of yellow, green, gold, white or bluish. Variegated forms also exist. Plant size and shape may range from a few inches across to several feet. Diversity in leaf color, plant shape and form make hostas excellent candidates for a wide variety of landscape situations.

Cultural Requirements

Planting

Hostas grow by underground stems called rhizomes. They prefer well-drained soils amended with organic matter, such as compost or rotted animal manure. Hostas do best on raised beds. They will not tolerate soggy conditions, especially during the winter months. Plant hostas by digging a hole as deep as the root ball and at least twice as wide as its diameter. Backfill and water well. Space hostas according to their spread at maturity.

Planting, transplanting and dividing should be done in early spring when the leaves begin to emerge. Dividing can be done either by cutting away a section of a clump with a sharp shovel or by lifting the root mass and separating it by hand. Separate the plant so that an "eye" is present in each division. Very small divisions tend to establish slowly. Most hostas can be divided in four to five years, depending on the vigor of the clumps.

Light requirement can range from partial sun to dense shade. It is important to know the specific needs of each hosta selected. With too much sunlight, leaf discoloration or leaf scorching may occur.

Fertilization and Watering

Hostas respond best to light fertilization. Soil testing will help determine lime and fertilizer requirements. Without the benefit of a soil test, apply ½ lb. of 10-10-10 per 100 sq. ft. at planting or when growth emerges in the spring. Slow release fertilizers can also be used to meet nutrition needs throughout the growing season. Place mulch around hostas to help conserve moisture. Keep them moist but not wet by applying supplemental irrigation only when necessary. Hot summer days may require additional irrigation. Avoid planting hostas in areas that receive direct afternoon sun.

Pests and Problems

Hostas are tough plants and when maintained as vigorous, healthy plants, insects and diseases are seldom a problem. However, if given the opportunity, slugs and snails will devour hostas freely. Organic controls or applications of registered insecticides are sometimes needed when slugs and snails are a problem.

In many areas, deer may be a problem. Deer often eat hosta foliage when other food is scarce. Deer repellants may give temporary control, however, fencing or the watchful eye of the pet dog may be the only sure way to keep deer away.

Recommended Hostas

The following is a partial list of hostas that should do well in the Georgia landscape:

H. "Antioch" has leaves of light gray-green with a creamy white border. Mature clumps of the 8 to 12-inch long tapered leaves measure 18 inches tall and 30 to 36 inches across. "Antioch" emerges later in spring than most hostas, avoiding damage by late frosts. It is striking as a specimen plant, in large containers and when massed.

H. "August Moon" is a desirable gold hosta for all around use. It forms a large, 20-inch tall and 30-inch wide clump, featuring rich gold, heavily crinkled, round leaves. Whitish mid-season flowers grow close to the foliage.

H. "Blue Cadet" a charming, small, blue hosta, makes a nice foreground or edging plant. The rounded, heart shaped leaves are 2 to 3 inches wide. Mid-season, this floriferous cultivar produces beautiful, mauve-blue flowers on erect 15-inch stems. Mature mounds are 15 to 18 inches in diameter and 12 inches tall.

H. Decorata is often incorrectly sold as *H. "Thomas Hogg."* Dark-green leaf blades, rounded at the tip and neatly edged in white, are borne on winged petioles. Deep blue, mid-season flowers contrast nicely with the variegated foliage. This rhizomatous hosta produces low-spreading mounds 8 to 10 inches tall, making it an ideal massed ground cover or accent plant.

H. fortunei "Aureomarginata" is often incorrectly labeled "Gold Crown" or "Golden Crown." Mature plants have 6 to 8 inch long, dark green leaves framed in rich gold borders. "Aureomarginata" forms clumps 24 to 30 inches wide and 18 inches tall; pale lavender flowers appear in mid-spring. This hosta seems to tolerate a wide range of growing conditions and holds up well until late in the growing season.

H. "Gold Edger." A compact growth habit (6 inches tall and 12 to 15 inches wide) and golden chartreuse leaves make this fast-growing cultivar an ideal edging for a bed or a path. Rounded, substantial leaves complement mid-season lavender flowers.

H. lancifolia. Shoots appear in early spring, and this floriferous species produces late season, lavender flowers. Twelve to 14 inch tall mounds form dense, uniform clumps.

H. "Royal Standard" is a regal hosta with rich, glossy green foliage. The vase-shaped, upright, 24-inch tall habit makes "Royal Standard" a good background plant. This cultivar can handle more sun than most hostas.

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H. sieboldiana "Elegans" is a very large hosta. Five to six-year-old clumps produce mounds 6 to 7 feet across and 30 inches high in good growing conditions. The heavily textured and crinkled large round leaves have a nice blue sheen early in the season. The whitish flowers are very fragrant and appear early.

H. ventricosa provides rich, dark green, heart-shaped leaves with a velvety sheen not found in many hostas. Mature mounds are 30 to 38 inches wide and 20 to 24 inches tall. Deep blue flowers are borne on 36 inch stems in mid-season.

H. "Gold Standard" emerges green in spring but gradually changes to a lovely gold. The leaves are nicely bordered in blue-green. Some morning sun produces the best coloration. "Gold Standard" can become a large 24- to 30-inch clump under ideal growing conditions. Its pale lavender flowers are insignificant when compared with the garden value of the leaves.

*Hosta variety information derived from Piccadilly Farms, Bishop, Georgia.

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GFGA Awards Committee
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