

Growing Hostas

Hostas are grown for their beautiful foliage in the shade garden. They evolved in Japan, Korea and China in environments with high rainfall levels. Sizes range from a few inches to over 5 feet. Foliage colors are available in shades of green, blue, chartreuse, white, yellow, gold or a combination. Leaves may be rounded, cupped, lance-shaped, corrugated, dimpled, folded, furled, heart-shaped, misted, ovate egg-shaped, or wavy. Small bell-shaped flowers produced on stems emerging in summer are lavender, purple or white, with some having a sweet fragrance.

- Shade – Plant in partial to full shade. Some varieties will tolerate morning sun, but no afternoon sun.
- Soil – Lots of organic matter and pine bark fines to provide aeration and retain moisture.
- PH – Average 6.0. Get soil tested by Clemson Extension Service.
- Water – Keep soil moist but not wet during growing season. Hostas have a high transpiration rate in summer due to the amount of foliage. Allow drier conditions during winter dormancy.
- Perennial – Returns every year as a larger clump. Hostas can vary significantly in growth rate.
- Foliage Habit – Dormant in winter with foliage dying down (herbaceous). Place a golf tee on your hosta as a winter reminder there is a plant underground.
- Spring Cleaning – Remove dead foliage prior to emergence of new growth.
- Fall Cleaning – Allow plants to die down naturally. Remove old foliage. Cover with mulch. Hostas need at least 8 weeks of below 40 degree temps for their winter dormancy.
- Division – Every 8-10 years or when clumps become overcrowded. Depends on hosta variety. Best to divide when new shoots are first visible in early spring, or in early Fall prior to dormancy. Dig the entire plant if possible and pull apart at natural divisions. Use a screwdriver or fork to loosen. Try not to cut into the crown of the plant as this makes the plant susceptible to crown rot. Replant new divisions and water well so there are no air pockets around roots.
- Blooms – Remove spent blooms and stems to encourage plant growth.
- Fertilizer – Osmocote slow release 14-14-14 in March and July. Apply phosphorus when dividing. Hostas love water soluble fertilizer like Miracle-Gro or Peters plant food every 2 weeks.
- Spring Freeze – Protect plants by covering with fabric (not plastic) without material touching leaves. Remove first thing in the morning. If damaged, cut off affected foliage to allow for new growth.
- Containers – Hostas grow well in containers. May need to water frequently. Use a mix of soil conditioner pine bark fines (70%) and a good potting soil like Miracle-Gro (30%).
- Deer – Place garlic, cayenne pepper, ammonia or coconut around base of plants. Smell and taste deterrent. May need to reapply after heavy rain.
- Voles – Keep mulch away from the base of the hosta. Voles travel under mulch. When planting, enclose crown and roots in a fine mesh screen basket, or place a layer of sharp gravel surrounding top 4 inches of roots.
- Slugs – Water in the morning instead of afternoon. Place saucers of beer or melon rinds near the plant at night to capture slugs. Place sharp material such as eggshells, sweet gum balls or gravel near base of plant. Slugs do not like to crawl across sharp material. Slug baits are discouraged as other animals may consume the poison.
- Foliar Nematodes – Shown by browning in between leaf veins in late summer. Remove and dispose of infected foliage. Do not compost.
- Hosta Virus – Dark uncharacteristic mottling of foliage. Transmitted from tools coming in contact with infected plant tissue. Plants should be destroyed. Disinfect tools with 10% bleach solution.