

Giboshihill Hostas

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Hosta Care

Hostas are hardy perennial plants that are frost tolerant to zone 3. All hostas require at least several weeks of winter chilling to below 4 degrees C. as part of their annual cycle of growth and rest. Hostas can be quite drought tolerant but when they are under stress their leaves will turn brown and burn.

Understanding the needs of hostas, and providing these needs will determine how well your hostas will grow. Hostas need well drained fertile soil, a bit of protection from the hot afternoon sun and an adequate water supply. However their needs may vary greatly in their individual requirements such as those for miniature hostas vs large hostas, or for late flowering hostas.

Hostas look best when planted with ferns or other perennials. When planting in the woods with wildflowers, make sure you remove all the surface tree roots within 2 feet of each hosta clump.

Soil Preparation:

It is of utmost importance that you prepare the soil well before planting as this could be the only time your soil is amended during the life of the hosta. Clay soil is rich in plant nutrients, but is very dense and heavy, giving poor drainage. Sandy soil is free draining so nutrients quickly wash through. Adding LOTS of organic material will do wonders for drainage, nutrients and oxygen levels in your soil. Turn or till your soil to 8 or 9 inches deep, add plenty of organic matter such as compost, bagged manure, shredded or partially decomposed leaves. The coarser the organic matter is, the larger the air spaces in the soil will be and the longer they will stay in the soil allowing for vigorous root growth. For miniature hostas, adding fine gravel or pea gravel to the soil will ensure good drainage and will firm the soil so your little hostas do not heave in the winter. You can add gravel to your soil for any sized hosta as a vole deterrent. Hosta roots do not grow deep in the soil, usually only about 4-8 inches deep. They grow outwards roughly to the width of the foliage.

Planting:

When planting, make a wide hole rather than a deep one. Create a small mound in the centre of the hole and spread the roots out over the mound and loosely fill the hole with amended soil and a little bit of slow releaser fertilizer if you have some. Water them in well. Adding some transplant solution to your water will help your hosta get over the shock of planting, especially if you have moved or divided a hosta. If you are planting a purchased potted hosta, make sure you shake off all of the potting mix from the roots. Do not plant with potting mix intact. Potting mix is a completely different planting medium than garden soil and it will not absorb or release water the same as your surrounding soil. If you plunk your hosta in the ground with all the potting mix intact your hosta roots may never leave the confines of the pot mixture, leaving you later with a weak and possibly dead hosta. (Remember all those dead mums you pull up from the garden in spring?). Also make sure you loosen all of the roots of your hosta

before planting. A hosta that has spent a considerable amount of time in a pot may have roots going around and around the pot, so don't be afraid to gently pull apart all the roots. Don't worry, hostas are very forgiving plants. They will thank you for untangling all their "feet" when they take off in your garden. If you have purchased a bare root hosta, make sure you soak it in water for a few hours first to hydrate it. You can use transplant solution in this water as well to help it along. You can use mulch in your garden to help conserve moisture and to moderate the soil temperature. Just make sure you keep the mulch away from the crown of the hosta to discourage fungal diseases. Keep your newly planted hostas well watered for the first few weeks until you start to see new growth on them. After that, a good deep soaking once a week should do if there is no rain.

Moving/dividing hostas:

You can move or divide hostas any time that the ground can be worked but the best times are either in the spring after the first flush of leaves are hardened off (this is when the plant is growing new roots and before the summer heat/drought) or in late summer after the hot weather is over but before the plant goes dormant for the season. When I am dividing a hosta, especially a big one, I find I get the best results when I soak my divisions in a large pail of water and transplant solution overnight, then plant in the early morning.

Fertilizing:

All hostas will benefit from a few feedings of fertilizer, whether it be organic matter such as compost or manure, granular fertilizer or foliar feeding as soil nutrients do deplete over time. Potted hostas do well with the addition of a slow release fertilizer and or a water soluble fertilizer.

Miniatures:

Miniature hostas are much more particular in their growing conditions. They require very well drained soil. The addition of fine gravel, pea gravel and fine bark chips should do the trick. Planting in a rock garden is ideal as the rocks will moderate the soil temperature. You can also top dress with a thin layer of pea gravel. Poorly drained soil and a wet summer will cause the roots to rot, however if you allow the soil to dry out too much, the plants will shrivel and dry up as the roots are tiny and shallow and cannot go deep for moisture. Miniature hostas will do better with at least a few hours of morning sun. They will not do well in deep shade. Don't let their fussy requirements deter you from trying minis. They are absolutely adorable and many grow quite fast if you meet their needs.

Sun Tolerance:

Hostas are actually shade tolerant perennials, not shade loving plants. Many hostas will grow in a considerable amount of sun provided they receive lots of moisture. Hostas from the *plantaginea* family require a site with full sun exposure for them to flower adequately as they are late flowering when the daylight hours are fewer, and the sun is weaker. Do give your hosta at least a few hours of sun a day. Hostas grown in full shade or alot of shade will be taller (reaching for the sun), will have larger leaves (need more surface area for photosynthesis), but will have far fewer shoots. Hostas grown with

high filtered shade such as from tall deep rooted oak trees will well. Hostas grown in lots of sun will be shorter and will have smaller leaves as they do not need to fight for the sun's energy. They will also have many more shoots, and will be healthier plants overall provided they receive adequate moisture. The more moisture at the roots, the more sun the hosta will take. Our property faces west and has alot more sun than shade. (We're working on shade) We push our hostas to the max with sun exposure. Yes they burn by the end of the season but you would be surprised how well some of them grow.

Blue hostas do best in the morning sun if you want to keep the blue color longer into the season. The blue color is actually a waxy coating (the same as is on a blueberry) that protects the leaves from the sun. All blue hostas will eventually go green later in the season. If you rub the blue coating on any blue hosta leaf, you will find they are all green underneath.

Hostas with alot of white variegation in them will benefit from shade in the afternoon to prevent leaf scorching and burn out.

Hostas with green, chartreuse or yellow leaves will tolerate more sun especially if they have thick leaves, AND provided they receive lots of moisture at the roots.

Hostas in Pots:

Yes you can grow hostas in pots. Get rid of all those costly annuals that you throw out at the end of the season and try something new. You can grow hostas in hanging pots, wall pots, window boxes, wheelbarrows, anything that has a good drainage hole in it. (Make sure your wheelbarrow isn't one that your spouse wants back as you will need to drill some holes in it). Try mixing them with a few trailing annuals or perennial, just make sure if they are annuals that you pull them out in the fall. Hostas will thrive in pots as you control the fertilizer and water they receive, and you can move them around your yard to where they are best suited, and where you find they grow best. Do not fertilize past mid August as the plants need to slow down and go dormant in fall. Keep some fragrant flowering hostas in pots near your patio if you have lots of sun there. You can even grow some hostas in tall pots in the shallow area of your garden pond provided the top half of the pot is not submerged. In the fall, make sure they receive a few good killing frosts so that the leaves shrivel and turn completely brown, water them in well and place them in an unheated garage or garden shed for the winter. If you do not have a building to put them in, gather them together and place a piece of plywood over them to keep any rain from accumulating on top of the pots. All you want to do is prevent any rain from accumulating on top, then later thawing and freezing as this is what would kill the hosta. A few times during the winter, check the pots for moisture level. If the soil is really dry and pulling away from the pot, place some snow on top, NOT water. Bring out the pots in April, clean off the dead leaves, and let them come up again. Potted hostas will need to be taken out and divided every few years.

Pests and Diseases:

If your hostas leaves have more holes in them than surface area late in the season, then you probably have slugs/snails and or earwigs. You can apply a 10 percent solution of household ammonia to the crown and surrounding area in early spring when the hosta shoots are first emerging to kill off the

eggs of slugs and snails. Later in the season you can pick them off at night if you only have a few hostas, or you can use one of the commercial baits. There is a non-toxic slug and snail bait on the market. You have to apply it all around the perimeter of the hosta, and repeat every 2 weeks. I have not seen a non-toxic earwig bait, most people use beer in dishes sunken into the ground or earwig containers.

The most common viral infection in hostas the past few years is Hosta Virus X (HVX). Symptoms include mosaic, chlorosis, and necrosis on leaves, severely affected leaves may wither and die. In light colored or variegated leaves, there may be dark irregular splotches of discoloration along the veins, in dark colored hosta leaves, there may be no discoloration, only distorted wrinkled sections that look like the leaf has been touched by a hot iron. HVX can be transmitted mechanically by hands, on tools, and on other equipment that comes into contact with virus-contaminated plant sap. When dividing or digging hostas, make sure you sterilize your hands and equipment with bleach in between each cut or hosta. HVX has been quite rampant, and there is no cure. If you see it on a plant in a store or nursery, do not buy it, inform the owner. If you suspect you have it, remove your plant very carefully, soil and all, and dispose of in your garbage. Don't take any chances with the rest of your hostas. Do not compost it as you will only spread the virus. Don't plant in that hole for the next year.

The best sites to visit to learn more about HVX are:

www.hostalibrary.org/firstlook/HVX.htm or www.americanhostasociety.org/HostaVirusX.html