

Wenke Wisdom

Hosta Growing Tips

Hostas are very important foliage plants in the landscape. There is an enormous range in size, shape and color. To date, there are over 1,200 different hostas. They are flowering plants, but it is their foliage that is the dominant design element. They are easy long-living perennials. Their season of interest is from spring through autumn. They look and do well in mixed plantings with other perennials and shrubs.

Bed Prep - Hostas do their best in a moisture retentive and highly organic soil. To achieve this, mix three inches of one third each of organic compost, manure and sphagnum peat moss for every 6-8" of tilled soil. Feed your newly planted Hostas with a starter fertilizer blended around the roots. Mulch lightly, no more than 1-2". Water regularly, preferably with a soaker hose.

Light Requirements - Although Hostas are synonymous with shade gardens, they all appreciate a "little" sunshine; some more than others. Most prefer light shade, but some hostas can tolerate full shade, while others are sun tolerant. Ideally, morning sun is best, since if left to fry in afternoon sun, they will sunburn. Fragrant Hostas must have more sun in order to bloom well; one third of the day or more. Heavily shaded areas should be avoided, as this condition will impair your hosta's blooming period and size. The general rule is that blues prefer more shade while the variegated, solid green, light green to yellow and those with white flowers tolerate more sun. Used well, the variegated hostas can highlight the garden. As an example, a shady green corner of ferns can be brought to life by a green and white hosta such as Francee, Patriot, or Fragrant Bouquet.

Spacing - Hostas come in six sizes. This table will give you an average width by size of a 6 to 10 year old plant and how far apart you should plant your Hostas from each other.

Size	Width	Distance Apart
Giant	4 to 6'	Plant 4 – 6' apart
Large	3 to 4'	Plant 3 – 4' apart
Medium	2'	Plant 2' apart
Small	1 – 2'	Plant 18" – 2' apart
Miniature	6 – 12"	Plant 15 – 18" apart
Dwarf	3 – 6"	Plant 6 – 15" apart

Companion Plantings

Trees - Roots of trees compete for available plant nutrients and moisture. Hostas planted under them have different requirements depending on the type of tree. Those with deep-rooted systems such as Oak, Linden or White Ash, require only that the bed around the tree base be amended. Hostas planted around trees with more invasive roots such as Maple, Sassafras, and Locust will, in addition to the soil amendment, appreciate your building a raised bed for them in which to call home.

Perennials – Hostas mix beautifully with any number of perennials. If you're planning a shade garden, intermingle Hosta with Ferns, Astilbes, Chelone, Columbine, Bleeding Heart, and Primrose. Mix sun tolerant Hosta with Daylilies for a non-traditional look. Groundcovers of Vinca, Ajuga, Ginger, Epipediums or Solomon's Seal combine to make an impressive perennial bed when planted with Hosta.

Pests and other Problems – The biggest insect problem facing Hostas are slugs. Ravenous feeders, slugs will lay a specimen Hosta to waste in no time. A number of chemical remedies are available such as "Snail & Slug Pellets. Leaf spot may occur occasionally, but may be controlled with a fungicide. Organic controls such as diamatous earth is also effective.

Water – Water is important for optimal growth. A minimum of an inch of water each week is recommended, and can come from rain, irrigation, or hand watering. Hostas that are grown in sandy soil may need even more water because of the increased drainage provided by the sandy conditions. In general, the greatest growth occurs when water exceeds the minimum recommended rate. Watering them on a regular basis in the morning is highly recommended.

Propagation and Division

Propagation of hostas is easily achieved by division. Except for one exception, Hosta ventricosa, they do not come true when planted from seed. Most home gardeners will propagate hostas by division.

Division should be done when no shoots are growing from the center of the mature clump and this bare area detracts from the appearance of the plant. Division of the clump will improve the plant's appearance. Lift the entire hosta clump and wash the soil from the roots, if possible, to make it easier to see where to cut to divide the clump. Cut with a sharp knife to make the divisions.

Spring is the easiest time to divide plants because new shoots are only a few inches high and the leaves have not expanded. Be careful not to overdivide hostas in spring; divide only the fast growing hostas then. Do not divide the sieboldianas or the Tokudamas in spring. New roots will not grow until the foliage has fully expanded and hardened off. During this period, the leaves may desiccate quickly on warm days, since the roots have been reduced in size or were injured during division. A hot day may cause injury such as leaf burn, but this is probably not permanent damage.

Though spring division is easiest, summer division is preferred and can be done in August, at least 30 days before the first fall frost date. Warm soil and higher humidity at this time promotes better root growth, and plants may put on a little growth spurt at this time.

Keep newly divided plants well watered for the first two weeks, especially if there is a period of drought. Some of the larger leaves on a division may be cut back to reduce water loss. Frequent division of a clump will restrict plant and leaf size, and keep it from developing to its desirable mature features.