

## Hostas A Garden Delight

Hostas are one of the most widely planted and enjoyed herbaceous perennials used in landscapes for its beauty, versatility, and reliability. A hosta can grow into a fine specimen very quickly.

Hostas are best known for their foliage. The green color ranges from the yellowish green through the pure green hue to the deep greenish blue, sometimes edging or being edged with creamy white. Some of these leaves can form a plant only 5 cm in diameter while others plants can easily reach 120 cm. Leaves can be elongated ovals, egg-shaped, or heart-shaped and range in length from 2 cm to 60 cm.

The texture of the leaves can vary greatly. They can be glossy, smooth, shiny, dull, leathery or puckered. Some hostas also have leaves with undulating or wavy edges.

The blooms appear on a raceme or stalk which grows near the centre of the plant well above the foliage. Colors range from pure white to lavender to a deeper bluish purple. Some varieties are also quite fragrant. As the plant matures, a clump may have several racemes. The blooms and leaves can be cut and enjoyed indoors, or dried for flower arrangements. After blooming the racemes may be cut.

Hostas work well in most landscapes. They stand out on their own, or in combination with most other plants. In shaded areas they are good companions for other perennials such as ferns, astilbe, Solomon Seal, daylilies, Bleeding Hearts, coral bells, anemone and blue fescue grass. Spring bulbs can be interspersed with the hostas. Since the roots hold soil well, hostas are effective on slopes.

Hostas prefer a lightly shaded location but will grow well in both sunny and deeply shaded areas. In sunny locations the plants will generally produce more leaves but the leaves are smaller. In shady areas the plants produce less leaves but the leaves are larger.

They tolerate both sandy and clay soils well, preferring a well drained area. When planting hostas, incorporate some peat moss, manure or bonemeal into the planting soil. Once planted, a layer of mulch helps hold moisture in the ground and improve air movement around the base of the plant.

A small amount of fertilizer will help to keep the plant looking its best. Watering, if needed, will help increase the size of the leaves and improve its appearance. Hosta planted in a sunny location may require more frequent watering.

A clump of hosta will gradually increase in size but seldom need to be divided. They can be left to grow for 10 years or more without being divided. Frequently leaf color and bloom color are more intense if the plants are not disturbed.

Propagation is done in the spring once the sprigs are big enough to see or in the fall. Dig up the rootball, then carefully wash the soil away. Separate the large clump into smaller clumps 15-25 cm in size. Replant each clump as described above. Each clump should produce a fine specimen next spring.

Next time you need just the right plant to fill a bare spot in your landscape select a hosta. It can reward you from spring until fall with its fresh appearance and brightness. You can take a few leaves to enhance floral arrangements you have indoors. And it will return next spring for you to enjoy all over again.