

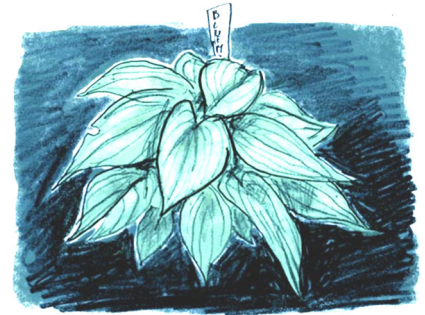


Made in the Shade with Hostas

The Perfect Perennial

Designating any one plant the "perfect" perennial invariably provokes a lively debate among gardeners. However, for gardening in the shade, one plant stands head and shoulders above the rest — hostas.

As hardy, herbaceous perennials, they are shade-tolerant, low maintenance, very forgiving, incredibly elegant — and quite possibly, habit-forming!



Grown primarily for their foliage, these natives of China, Japan and Korea were introduced into the United States from Europe in the early 1800's. Because of their overwhelming popularity as the number one perennial grown today, there are literally thousands of hosta cultivars available.

An Incredible Range of Foliage Options

The range of hosta foliage, color, shape, texture and size is extraordinary.

- Foliage colors include green, blue, white, gold and countless unique variegated combinations.
- Leaves are shaped like circles, ovals, hearts and lances.
- Hostas grow in both upright and symmetrical mounding habits.
- Leaf texture can be smooth, glossy, cupped, seer-suckered or rippled.
- Mature plant size ranges anywhere from 2 inches in height and 4 inches in width, to 36 inches in height and more than 60 inches in width.
- And, if this range of options wasn't sufficient, hostas also bloom in colors ranging from white to lavender to purple. Some varieties are also fragrant.

With such a range of choices, a hosta for almost every landscape situation can be found. Hostas are perfect companions for other perennials and shrubs including astilbe, dicentra (bleeding heart), ferns, tiarella (foam flower), tradescantia (spiderwort) and hydrangeas.

Shade Loving vs. Shade Tolerant

Most gardeners believe hostas are shade loving. Actually, they are shade tolerant. The irony about hostas is that they actually grow and bloom more vigorously in full sun. However, the leaves become scorched and unattractive in full sun.

While some varieties are touted to be more sun tolerant, a full sun exposure in the Midwest with our sun intensity, hot temperatures and drying winds will almost invariably result in leaf scorching. Nonetheless, most hostas will benefit from a couple of hours of morning sun. This is particularly true when growing any hosta containing a significant amount of white on the leaf — especially the white centered cultivars — since they have less chlorophyll and are inherently less vigorous.

For those gardeners that insist on planting hostas in a location subject to afternoon sun, the fragrant flowering varieties, which are more heat tolerant, should be used.

When placed in sites with more sun exposure, additional water is needed to help avoid leaf scorch. While trees provide essential shade, they also compete with hostas for moisture and nutrients. Once established, hostas can tolerate a drier shade. However, they will always be more vigorous with consistent moisture.

Hostas optimally consume 1 inch to 1.5 inches of water a week during the summer months. During periods of drought, supplemental watering is required.

Pests and Diseases

Slugs. Hostas are relatively pest-free with the exception of slugs that work at night leaving small holes in the leaves. Slugs require moist, dark conditions and prefer soft, immature leaf growth. Mature leaves and those with more substance — thick leaves — are generally more slug-resistant.

Good horticultural practices can reduce slug damage. Use of a coarse bark mulch and generous spacing between plants that allows good air circulation will create a dry and rough surface that the slugs would rather not travel over.

Avoid watering late in the day so that the foliage is dry at night.

If all else fails, commercial slug baits are available. Always follow label directions and reapply as directed. Slug baits will contain either metaldehyde (which can be poisonous to pets and children) or iron phosphate (compounds commonly found in fertilizer).

Rabbits and deer. Rabbits and deer can also present problems. While commercial repellent sprays are available, a physical barrier of netting or fencing is the only 100% effective way to combat these larger pests.

HVX virus. While hostas are relatively disease-free, an outbreak of a new hosta virus emerged in mid-2004. It is simply referred to as Hosta Virus X or HVX. The outbreak seems to be traced to bare rootstock imported from Holland. As with other viruses, there is no cure.

Until the infected stock is removed from the marketplace, hosta buyers should be *very cautious and only deal with reputable nurseries and garden centers*. Beware of foliage that has a random green mottling that follows the veins of the leaf. The virus can be spread by the “sap” from an infected plant when cutting a leaf, bloom scape or rhizome. You can view pictures of HVX diseased cultivars on the Hosta Library site at www.HostaLibrary.org.

Planting Hostas

Hostas are generally purchased as potted plants. This means you can plant them any time during the growing season including summer and fall. Just make sure to provide adequate moisture.

- Work plenty of organic matter — such as compost or sphagnum peat — into the soil at the time of planting. Hostas prefer moisture retentive, well-drained soil that is slightly acidic, but thrive even in our typically alkaline soils.
- If the hosta is root-bound in the container, tease the roots loose before planting.
- Use a root stimulator solution at the time of planting to encourage root growth.
- Mulch to a depth no more than 1 to 1.5 inches. Leave the ground bare about 6 inches around the base of the plant.
- Keep the soil evenly moist until the plant is well established.

The Great Divide

Each year hostas will reward gardeners with additional offsets that enlarge the clump size. Hostas take three to six years for the foliage to develop a mature texture and character, and five to eight years to achieve a mature clump size.

Unlike many perennials, hostas do not need to be divided unless you feel compelled to propagate additional plants. Hostas can be divided any time from spring through early fall as long as the roots have time to develop before the first frost. Division is easiest in the spring shortly after the "eyes" emerge from the ground, but there are many gardeners who consider fall the optimum time for division. Use a spade to remove a wedge-shaped portion from the clump or dig the entire plant and section it into as many divisions as desired.

Fall and Winter Care

Hostas are quite hardy in the Kansas City area and over-wintering is easy. Many gardeners prefer to leave the dead foliage in place along with fallen tree leaves to provide additional insulation for the winter. Leaving the old flower scapes also helps to mark the plant's location so the gardener can avoid trampling the new growth in the spring.

Popular Hosta Cultivars— Large

Name	Size	Description
Blue Angel	32" H x 70" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest blue hosta known with huge heart-shaped deep blue leaves of heavy substance • Good slug resistance
Empress Wu	39" H x 66" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the largest of hostas with outstanding upright habit • Some leaves can measure up to 1.5 feet wide • Green leaves are deeply veined and cordate-based • Pale lavender flowers in early summer
Frances Williams	28" H x 63" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best known of all hosta cultivars • Heavily corrugated blue-green leaves circled with a wide golden yellow margin • Thick substance • Slug resistant • A classic, but rapidly being replaced by much improved cultivar 'Olive Bailey Langdon'
Great Expectations	29" H x 58" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the most beautiful hostas with large creamy yellow puckered leaves edged by wide, irregular margins of blue and light green • Heavy corrugation • Slug resistant
Guacamole 2002 Hosta of the Year	24" H x 54" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large, shiny chartreuse leaves are margined by a wide green edge • Rapid growth rate • Good sun tolerance • Fragrant flowers
Guardian Angel	28" H x 55" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misted white and green leaf center surrounded by blue-green margin • Changes to dark green by mid-summer • Sensational early season specimen
Krossa Regal	33" H x 71" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Powdery blue-grey foliage turning dark green by mid-summer • Towering 5 to 6 feet tall blooms in mid-summer • A wonderful hosta for structure in the landscape • Slug resistant
Montana Aureomarginata	27" H x 68" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arching wedge-shaped green leaves with irregular margins of yellow turning cream as the season progresses • Early to emerge in spring and may require protection from late frosts
Regal Splendor 2003 Hosta of the Year	30" H x 70" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinct hosta with creamy yellow margins on frosty blue leaves in spring changing to creamy white margins on a dark green center by mid-summer • Good substance • Great specimen or background plant

Name	Size	Description
Sagae 2000 Hosta of the Year	31" H x 70" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dramatic color combination and majestic vase-shaped form • Large dark green leaves with margins that change from gold to creamy yellow or white by mid-summer • Good slug resistance
Spilt Milk	24" H x 52" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dramatic new hosta with white streaks and splashes on green heart-shaped leaves • Wrinkled, textured leaves with good substance
Sum and Substance 2004 Hosta of the Year	31" H x 70" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largest of all hosta cultivars • Immense, glossy textured, light green to chartreuse to gold leaves with lavender flowers in August • Unique specimen plant with thick substance • Quick growing • Slug resistant
Sun Power	28" H x 70" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the very best gold hostas with unique twisted, pointed gold foliage • Color enhanced when exposed to morning sun or bright light

Medium

Name	Size	Description
Abiqua Drinking Gourd 2014 Hosta of the Year	22" H x 46" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dark blue-green seersucker and deeply cupped leaves with heavy substance • Near white flowers in mid-summer
Dancing Queen 2020 Hosta of the Year	18" H x 30" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bright yellow-gold foliage is broad and wedge shaped with a rippled edge • Pale lavender flowers in summer
Fragrant Bouquet 1998 Hosta of the Year	22" H x 48" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features apple green leaves with wide irregular yellow to cream margins • Large funnel-shaped, fragrant, nearly white flowers in mid to late summer • Excellent growth rate
Gold Standard	22" H x 60" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of the most popular hostas ever introduced • Leaves have dark green margins with a center that changes to chartreuse, then gold • Fast growing

Name	Size	Description
Halcyon	18" H x 43" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classic blue colored hosta with spear-shaped foliage • Excellent color, substance and growth rate • Good slug resistance
Inniswood	22" H x 48" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bright gold heart-shaped leaves bordered with a wide deep green margin • Heavy texture, corrugation and thick substance • Good slug resistance • Great specimen
June 2001 Hosta of the Year	16" H x 37" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pointed gold leaves with great substance, bordered by a blue and green shaded margin • Center will bleach to creamy-white in bright light
Love Pat	19" H x 40" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features thick deep blue-green leaves with a quilted texture • Thick substance and cupped leaves at maturity • Excellent specimen plant • Slug resistant
Paradigm	22" H x 45" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful gold leaves edged with dark blue-green margin • Variegation pattern intensifies later in spring • Moderate corrugation and good substance
Patriot 1997 Hosta of the Year	22" H x 50" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same dark green center and form as 'Francee' but with a wider white margin • Likes bright light
Pauls Glory 1999 Hosta of the Year	22" H x 55" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spectacular hosta with gold heart-shaped leaves bordered by a dark blue-green margin • Chartreuse center slowly turns to gold (or white with bright light) • Vigorous
Striptease 2005 Hosta of the Year	20" H x 50" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outstanding, one of a kind hosta • Sport of 'Gold Standard' • Wide dark green margins and a thin white stripe (the "striptease") between the margin and gold center area • Good growth rate

Dwarf and Small

Name	Size	Description
Blue Mouse Ears 2008 Hosta of the Year	8" H x 19" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mini mounding habit with small round grey-green leaves • Lavender flowers on short scapes
Curly Fries 2016 Hosta of the Year	11" H x 22" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly ruffled and narrow leaves emerge yellow and fade to near white. • Lavender flowers appear mid to late summer
Lakeside Paisley Print 2019 Hosta of the Year	10" H x 30" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medio-variegate type with wide, wavy, heart shaped leaves • Margins are green narrow creamy-white centers having a feathery pattern — Striking • Pale lavender flowers in mid summer
Pandoras Box	4" H x 10" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White leaf centers with a dark green margin • A lighter green area appears in the leaf where the white and green meet • On everyone's wish list
Rainbow's End 2021 Hosta of the Year	11" H x 21" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medio-variegate type (white in the middle with green streaking toward the margin) • Mounding habit with purple bloom
On Stage	14" H x 24" W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bright yellow leaf center with an irregular green margin • The reverse variegation of Montana 'Aureomarginata' • Late to emerge in the spring

K·STATE
Research and Extension
Johnson County

Extension Master Gardener Hotline

(913) 715-7050

garden.help@jocogov.org

For your lawn, garden and horticulture questions

REV. 2023

"Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service."

K-State Research and Extension is committed to making its services, activities, and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special require-