

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 22

Hosta

History

The hosta originates in Asia and has been used in Chinese and Japanese gardens for centuries. First mention of the hosta in the western world was by the Dutch. The first hostas to arrive were two Chinese varieties, *Hosta plantaginea* and *Hosta ventricosa*.

Doctor Philipp Franz von Siebold played an important role in getting the hosta all over Europe, collecting and cultivating many varieties. About 2000 cultivars are available now.

Description

Hostas are herbaceous perennials grown for their attractive foliage, with some recent cultivars also having attractive and/or fragrant flowers.

They vary in height from 2 inches to 4 feet tall, having trumpet-like flowers of white or various shades of blue and purple on strong, spike-like stalks. Foliage colours are green, blue, gold, white and yellow, with centre or edge variations. Foliage textures range from smooth to crinkled, and surfaces vary from dull to glossy. Leaf shapes also vary from rounded to oval, heart-shaped to strap-like, and can be flat, wavy-edged or somewhat contorted.

Light

Light requirements range from full sun to dense shade. Although most cultivars grow best in shade, some, such as “Sum and Substance” or “Honeybells,” will tolerate partial to full sun if frequently watered.

Although exceptions exist, yellow-foliage varieties are usually more tolerant of sun

exposure, and blue-foliage varieties prefer shade. Plants in all-day shade will not produce as many flowers as sun-tolerant varieties that receive some morning sun, and most keep their leaf colour better in the shade.

Soil

The hosta requires a slightly acidic soil that is well drained, to avoid root rot. Once established they become tolerant to drought but require regular moisture for best appearance and size. To improve the soil’s water- and oxygen-holding capacity, add organic matter at one third of the volume of soil, and dig in to an 8-inch depth. Good soil will help the plant to maintain good health.

Pests

When healthy, hostas are seldom bothered by insects and other pests. The only exception is slugs, as they prefer the same environment as hostas, although they seem to do less damage on the thickest or coarsest leaves.

To control slugs, water in the morning to allow the soil to dry before slugs become active at night, and maintain good air circulation by thinning nearby plants. Use mulch sparingly as it provides hiding and breeding places for slugs.

Value

Hostas are reliable and well suited to most gardens because of their many varieties, ease of care, and ability to live practically forever. They are very versatile and can be used as edge, ground cover, accent, or backdrop.

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