

Hosta

Hostas are easy-to-grow, shade-tolerant perennials grown mainly for their beautiful foliage.

Height/Spread

The size of hostas varies greatly. The largest measures 4 feet in height with 20-inch-long leaves. The smallest collectors' miniatures may be only a few inches across. Most hostas range between 1 and 2½ feet tall. Growing conditions influence size.



'Sum and Substance' hosta.
Karen Russ, ©2008 HGIC, Clemson Extension

Growth Rate

Hostas are very long-lived. Hostas may outlive their gardeners if given a good planting location and reasonable care.

Ornamental Features

Hosta leaves come in many shapes, colors, sizes and textures. The leaves grow as clump-like mounds in colors ranging from yellow-green to dark green to blue-green. Variegated forms are common.

Hosta leaves may be rounded to oval, heart-shaped or strap-like. The leaf may be flat, have a wavy edge or have an interesting puckered texture.

Hostas are also grown for their flowers, which are produced from early summer to fall depending on the species and cultivar. Flowers may be white, lavender or purple. Some hostas are fragrant.



Hosta flowers
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Problems

Garden slugs are the most common problem of hostas. The most popular remedy is saucers of beer, which attract slugs, and then they drown. Use caution if you use slug baits since they can also poison pets. Space plants further apart.

Hostas will change color or fade if they are in too much sun. Most blue hostas need shade. In full sun, leaf color is pale and leaf dieback may occur, especially during dry periods. Yellow and cream edges may brown during dry periods. Blue-leaved cultivars sometimes fade to green if the waxy leaf

covering that gives them their color is rubbed off by strong rain storms or vigorous watering.

Voles and deer can be a problem if wildlife is active in your area. Voles feed on the root system and kill the plant. Deer feed on the foliage and a portion of the leaf petioles.

Foliar nematodes can also be a problem. Buy new plants in late summer or fall so you can check for infestation. Do not purchase plants that show yellowing and browning in between leaf veins.



The yellow and brown leaf areas between major veins are from damage by foliar nematodes feeding within the leaf tissue. The elongate holes are caused by slug feeding. Joey Williamson, ©2014 HGIC, Clemson Extension

Hosta anthracnose can cause large whitish spots with brown edges to form on leaves and stalks. Remove the damaged leaves.

Several viruses may infect hostas and cause symptoms such as mottling of the green color, ring spots, leaf puckering, twisting or distortion, necrosis and death. Viruses may be spread by insects or mechanical transmission. The latter can occur when there is contact of the infected plant's sap with the sap of a healthy plant, such as when dividing plants, removing leaves or flower scapes. One common virus is *Hosta virus X*, which is more prevalent on certain cultivars, such as 'Sum & Substance.' There is no cure or chemical treatment for a virus infected plant. They should be dug and disposed to prevent the spread.

Landscape Use

Hostas prefer areas that are partly shaded or shaded. Some cultivars are sun-tolerant, but all do best if they receive shade in the afternoon.



Hosta virus X on a 'Sum & Substance' hosta, exhibiting sunken, dark green areas on an otherwise uniformly green leaf. Joey Williamson, ©2014, HGIC, Clemson Extension

Hostas prefer well-drained soil with plenty of organic matter. Hostas need plenty of moisture during the growing season to support the growth of their large, soft leaves. They will need an inch or more of water per week if not supplied by rains. If the weather is very hot or the plants are in sun or subject to root competition from trees and shrubs, they will need more water.

In early spring after the first growth starts, apply a well-balanced, slow-release fertilizer. Avoid excessive fertilizer rates.

Plant, transplant and divide hostas either in the early fall or in spring before leaves unfold. While hostas can be successfully divided at any time that they can be dug, they will need much more care if divided during summer heat. Divide hostas by either cutting away a section of a clump with its roots or by lifting the clump and separating it. Be sure to use clean, sharp tools. Replant the new plants promptly and water well. Space plants 1 to 3 feet apart, allowing room for growth. Hostas do best when left undisturbed for several years.

Remove flower stalks after bloom to encourage vigorous growth, rather than seed production. Remove hosta leaves and clean up around the plants after they have died back in the fall to help control diseases and slugs.

Species & Cultivars

There are more than 2,000 registered cultivars of hosta grown today. The species and cultivars mentioned below are just a few of those that are well-suited to growing throughout South Carolina.

Plantain Lily (*Hosta plantaginea*): This is the most heat-and sun-tolerant hosta species, and they will grow in shade to three-quarters of a day of sun. Plantain Lily cultivars are ideal for growing in the South. They flower in late August and September, with wonderfully fragrant blossoms that open at night. The leaves are fresh lime green and the flowers are large and white. They grow well on the coast, as they do not need a long dormant period.

- 'Royal Standard' grows 18 inches tall by 38 inches wide. Blooms white.



'Royal Standard' hosta flowers.

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- 'Aphrodite' is a double-flowered cultivar. Intensely fragrant flowers open in
- 'August Moon' grows 20 inches tall with a
- 30-inch spread.
- 'Honeybells' grows 18 to 24 inches tall with light lavender flowers in mid-August.

Fortune's Plantain Lily (*H. fortunei*): This one has pale lavender flowers. It blooms in late spring and early summer. Many of the most garden-worthy hostas are fortunei cultivars. Most grow 1 to 1 ½ feet tall and 2 feet wide. They prefer shade to a half-day of sun.

- 'Albomarginata' has green ovate leaves splashed with a white creamy border.
- 'Hyacinthina' has large heart-shaped leaves with a blue cast. The color changes in summer to a deep to olive green. The prolific lavender flowers grow in a hyacinth shape.

- 'AureoMarginata' has deep green oval leaves accented by a marked gold edge.



Hosta fortunei 'Aureo-Marginata'

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Hosta Hybrids

- 'Sum & Substance' has large, glossy chartreuse leaves so thick that they resist slug damage. Best color is achieved in sun. Grows 30 inches tall by 60 inches wide. Blooms white.
- 'Kabitan' has very low narrow leaves of yellow to chartreuse with a narrow, dark green margin. The plants spread slowly as ground cover and edging. Blooms deep purple. Will not tolerate excessive sun.
- 'Gold Standard' has heart-shaped chartreuse leaves with a deep green irregular margin. With some sun, the center of the leaf turns bright gold. Grows 20 inches tall by 36 inches wide.
- 'Moonlight' is a variant of 'Gold Standard' with a creamy-white edge. Lavender flowers. Needs shade for best results.
- 'Patriot' has dark green leaves with a wide striking white margin. Grows 12 inches tall by 30 inches wide.
- 'Golden Tiara' has green heart-shaped leaves with a neat gold margin. Blooms purple. These small hostas are ideal for edging. They grow 1 foot tall by 2 feet wide.
- 'Francee' has wide pointed leaves of dark green with a narrow, bright white margin. This is a long-time favorite among hosta lovers. Grows 24 inches tall by 36 inches wide. Blooms lavender.



'Francee' hosta

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Revised by Joey Williamson, HGIC Horticulture Extension Agent, Clemson University, 11/14. Originally prepared by Karen Russ, HGIC Horticulture Specialist, and Bob Polomski Extension Consumer Horticulturist, Clemson University (New 03/99. Images added 05/09 & 11/14.)

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