

Pests and Problems

Hosta are generally easy to grow. Like all plants they can be attacked by insects and pests.

1. Slugs – love the cool moist conditions hostas are grown in. They feed at night and leave holes in the leaves and stalks. Beer traps are effective. Hand removal is tedious but works.



Spraying a 5-10% household ammonia, bleach or vinegar solution works but only on contact with slugs. It is effective on thick crowns with the slugs hiding down inside them. Iron phosphate or metaldehyde baits are also effective.

2. Leaf beetles, cutworms and grasshoppers can also attack the leaves leaving a swiss cheese effect and eating leaves from the edge in. Put up a wren house. House wrens are a wonderful natural predator for slugs and other chewing insects and caterpillars. Otherwise, Sevin*, Bonide* Eight and other insecticides will control.

3. Deer – numerous home remedies. Commercial spray repellants, homemade repellants with hot peppers in them, a big dog, a deer fence, electric fence, etc.

4. Mice and voles will eat the roots and your plant will be gone. Control the critter by trap or plant plants in a wire mesh basket.

5. Moles and chipmunks will tunnel under plants and destroy contact of roots with soil and water. Trap or try controlling grubs in soil which might reduce mole population.



6. Aphids cause small pin prick spots on leaves that may later become infected with fungus and turn brown. Systemic pesticides or insecticidal soap will help control aphids.

Visit the American Hosta Society webpage at www.hosta.org for more information on pests and disease and hostas.

Disease Concerns

Hosta, like all plants, can be infected by various fungal and viral diseases.

Crown Rot – generally the whole plant is affected and leaves seem to flop down and die. There are several organisms that can cause this and may require different treatments. Remove disease tissue and dispose. Southern Blight- leaves start yellowing at the tips, then the stalks collapse. This is usually a late summer problem in the Midwest. This is a soil borne pathogen and requires a soil drench of 10 % bleach water solution or fungicides that are effective for **Sclerotium rolfsii**.

Anthracnose - small reddish brown spots appear on leaves. This usually occurs on stressed or damaged plants and is a secondary fungal infection. Try to keep plants growing well with no heat, water or nutrient stress. For hail, sleet or physical damage you may want to try a preventative systemic fungicide to stop secondary fungal infections. Systemic fungicides will help control future problems but spots already present will not go away. Good fall cleanup with removal and disposal of diseased foliage will help reduce disease in following years.

Viruses – HVX is a virus affecting hosta. HVX does not seem to affect other garden plants. The only effective control is to remove the plant and dispose of it. Be sure to disinfect all tools when dividing, digging or working from plant to plant. Distorted coloring of leaves is a predominant feature.



Other viruses can also be a problem for hostas and all garden plants.

Remember to follow all directions and state and federal regulations when using pesticides or fungicides.



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The Friendship Plant



H. 'World Cup'

Let's Grow Hosta

Light conditions

Hostas are shade *tolerant* plants. They grow wild in bright but cloudy overcast conditions at cool higher elevations. Here we grow them in high light shade or in dappled sunlight. Most will do well with cool early morning sun. Some will tolerate a couple of hours of late afternoon sun if kept well watered.

Avoid dark shade - hostas do need light to grow.

Water

Hosta grows best with an ample water supply. Provide at least an inch of water a week. They do not thrive under hot dry conditions.

Keep them well watered throughout the autumn as they enjoy a second flush of growth in the later summer through fall.

Avoid planting hosta where they will have a lot of competition for water with tree roots. Areas under maple, spruce and other trees with roots close the surface of the soil should be avoided. If you cut into roots when you dig into the soil you may want to find another area to plant the hosta.

Fertilizer

Fertilizer will give a boost to plants but is not always required. Any well balanced fertilizer will do in either solid or liquid application. Apply when plants show first flush of growth and later at second flush and at 1-2 times spaced through the growing season. Or, use a long term slow release fertilizer. Do not put solid fertilizer into crown of plant as it may burn the foliage and crown.

Avoid fall feeding as you want the plants to start hardening off rather than having a growth spurt just before freezing.

Clean up: Fall or Spring?

Removal is not mandatory. However, if you have slugs, nematodes, or disease problems removal can help reduce pest and pathogens. Dispose and do not compost these leaves.

There are pros and cons for removal in fall or spring. Usually your energy level will determine which you prefer. Foliage removes easily in the spring. It can usually be raked away. In the fall you may have to cut the leaf stalks away.

Planting Your Hosta

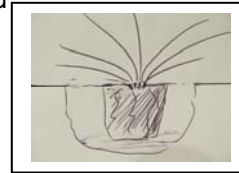
Planting Your Hosta

Pot grown hostas can be planted at any time. High heat and drought can be plant stressors, however.

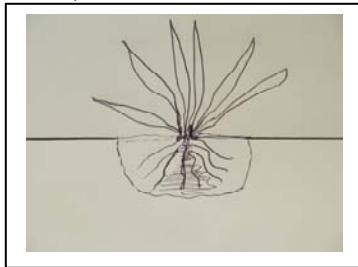
Hostas grow best in loose loamy soil with plenty of organic matter. Prepare your bed. Remove weeds. Till soil and add compost or peat moss so that you have a loose friable soil.

Hosta should be planted so that the crown, where all the new growth buds are, is at the same depth as it is in the pot or ground. The eyes should be just below the surface. The hole you dig should be a little deeper than the pot your hosta comes in but should be a least twice as big around so the roots can spread out and grow.

Turn the pot over with your hand over the surface of the pot and holding the plant in, tap the pot gently on the rim to loosen the plant. The plant should fall into your hands.



If the plant is root bound you should separate and spread the roots apart. Place plant in hole so that crown, where the roots and leaf stalks meet, is just below the soil surface. Add more soil under the plant if necessary. Spread roots laterally out into hole. Now fill in with soil and tamp gently into place.



Water in. Add more soil if necessary.

FLOWERS

Some people like them. Some do not. It is alright to remove the stalk at any time if you do not like them. If you do not want seeds or seedlings remove the flower stalk sooner and more energy will go into the crown for future plant growth.

Dividing

Most hosta divide easily and are surprisingly tough and resilient.

Hosta can also be divided at any time but spring, just as the plants are coming up, is generally thought best. Cool overcast days will put the least stress on the plants as they reestablish their roots.

1. You may simply take your clump and cut through the root ball between the leaf petioles with a knife or shovel to separate. Try to leave a number of eyes or plant stalks in each division.



2. Another option is to take the plant and wash away most of the soil around the roots. A hose or pail of water is good for this. Then pull and twist away a clump off the main plant. You may have to hand separate some of the roots or make a small cut at the crown if it is very thick.



3. It is wise to have a 10% bleach solution at hand. You should clean knives or tools in this between cuts to avoid spreading disease. You can also dunk the root ball in this solution if cuts were made.

4. Many will cut off all the foliage about 4-6 inches above the ground if the dividing is done after the leaves are fully matured out. This will force a new flush of leaves and avoid the plant stress of trying to keep the leaves hydrated with a much reduced root system.

MULCH

Mulching is a matter of garden preference. Mulch has many benefits including keeping the soil cool and conserving moisture. It also can add organic matter as it decays. But some mulches are slug havens.

If you do mulch, do not have it deeper than 2-3 inches and do not push mulch up into the crown. Keep it several inches away to avoid crown burn.