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# Hostas in Minnesota Gardens

Hostas are long-lived herbaceous perennials that have much to offer the gardener. They thrive in semi-shade and are comparatively free of insects and diseases. After plants are established, they require little care.

Hostas are grown primarily for their rich, luxuriant foliage; some are handsomely variegated. They produce an abundance of flowers on graceful stems. Hosta flowers range from pure white to deep blue and some of them are delightfully fragrant. Certain plants start blooming in early summer and others continue to bloom until frost.

Large hostas can be used effectively to conceal unsightly foundations. Small ones can be used as border or edging plants or as ground cover plants in shady locations. The bold, attractive foliage is especially useful for creative floral arrangements.

## NOMENCLATURE

The genus *Hosta* is referred to by three common names: *hosta*, *funkia*, and *plantainlily*. Unfortunately, the specific names for this plant have been badly confused.

Plants should be purchased from a nursery that specializes in hostas. Such a nursery should have plants that are properly named and should carry some of the newest and choicest varieties.



This picture of the named hosta 'Honeybells' shows the habit of the plant and its flowers. The flowers are borne on 30-inch stems.

## SITE AND SOIL

A few hostas will grow in full sun, but most of them require some shade. Though they will tolerate full shade, they grow best in a semi-shady location. It is best to plant them on the north or east side of a building. Do not plant hostas beneath trees or shrubs that have massive, shallow root systems.

Hostas prefer a soil of medium fertility, but one that is high in organic matter. It should be a deep soil and, preferably, a slightly acid soil. There must be good drainage at all times, especially during late winter and spring.

## PLANTING

Before you plant hostas, spade organic matter into the soil. Plant them in the spring. If you plant in the fall, you risk losing unestablished plants during the winter. Place the buds just below the soil level and water them thoroughly after planting.

## CULTURE

Hostas require a constant water supply throughout the growing season because their large, succulent leaves expend large amounts of water. Using a summer mulch will conserve water and reduce



This species, *Hosta fortunei* 'Marginato-alba,' has a white leaf margin. Note the clean, neat foliage and the mulch of grass clippings.

weed competition. Using a loose winter mulch such as marsh hay is good assurance against winter injury to hostas, especially in the northern part of the state. Remove all dead foliage from the previous year's growth before spring growth starts.

### PROPAGATION

You can divide clumps of hostas every 5 to 8 years. However, since large clumps are the most attractive landscape specimens, don't divide them unnecessarily. Divide plants early in the spring before growth starts. Use a sharp knife for making divisions. Each division should have at least two or three buds with their roots attached.

### PEST CONTROL

Since hostas are nearly free of pests, control measures usually are not necessary. If chewing insects such as grasshoppers are a problem, use chlordane to control them. Occasionally, slugs may be a problem. You can control them with metaldehyde sprays or baits.

Plants with bleached or dry foliage are suffering from sunburn. Move them to a shady location.

### SPECIES AND CULTIVARS

Only the very common hostas are mentioned below. A glance at this list shows how confusing the nomenclature of this group is. The names given first are correct and used by a majority of growers. Names in parentheses are used by some growers but are obsolete.

Hosta albomarginata 'Alba' (Hosta minor alba)  
This small plant has narrow, dark-green leaves and produces white flowers in late summer.

Hosta albomarginata 'Albomarginata' (Hosta lancifolia albomarginata)  
This plant is similar to the preceding one, except it has a narrow white rim along its leaf margins and has lavender flowers.

Hosta crispula  
The dark-green leaves of this plant have a white margin. They are somewhat wavy and have a lustrous underside. Pale purple flowers are produced in early summer. Mature plants make handsome landscape specimens. This hosta produces a heavy crop of seed.

Hosta decorata Bluntleaf Plantainlily (Hosta 'Thomas Hogg')  
This hosta has blunt, dull, dark-green leaves with narrow white margins. Unlike most other hostas, this small plant never produces a dense clump. It produces purple flowers on a 2-foot stem in mid-summer.

Hosta fortunei Tallcluster Plantainlily  
This is a medium-sized plant with broad, dark-green foliage. It produces flowers on a tall stalk in mid-summer. The flowers are purple with white streaking.

Hosta fortunei 'Albo-marginata'  
This plant is similar to Hosta crispula, but it seldom produces seed.

'Honeybells'  
Honeybells is a vigorous grower that develops a large clump. Flowers are borne on a 30-inch stem in late summer. The fragrant flowers are very pale lavender, almost white. The foliage is a pale green. This hosta requires a shady location.

Hosta lancifolia Narrowleaf Plantainlily  
This small plant quickly forms a dense clump of narrow, glossy, dark-green leaves. It will tolerate full sun as well as grow in a shady location. It blooms with purplish-blue flowers in late summer.

Hosta plantaginea (Hosta subcordata grandiflora)  
This hosta produces very large, ascending, fragrant, white flowers in late summer. It is grown for its flowers more than any other hosta. It has large, light-green leaves and does best in a shady location.

'Royal Standard'  
Royal Standard is a plant of medium size that flowers in late summer. The fragrant, pure white flowers are produced on 18- to 20-inch stems.

Hosta sieboldiana Siebold Plantainlily (Hosta glauca)  
This robust plant forms a very attractive clump. Its foliage ranges from bluish green to almost a greenish blue. Plants with an intense bluish foliage are the most desirable. The plant's pale lavender flowers are borne on stalks that reach just above the foliage in early summer.

Hosta sieboldiana 'Aureomarginata' Yellowedge Siebold Plantainlily  
This very choice plant is like the preceding one, except its leaves have a wide yellow band along the margin.

Hosta undulata 'Erromenea' Midsummer Plantainlily  
This is a vigorous, medium-sized plant with dark-green leaves. Its leaves are only slightly wavy. It produces pale lavender flowers on a stalk about 30 inches tall in mid-summer.

Hosta undulata 'Undulata' Wavyleaf Plantainlily  
This small plant has wavy leaves variegated with white. The leaves have a narrow green band along the leaf margin and a large area of white in the center of the leaf blade. The plant requires shade.

Hosta undulata 'Univitata'  
This plant is similar to the preceding one, but it is more robust. Its leaves have a smaller center area of white and they are less wavy than those of the wavyleaf plantainlily.

Hosta ventricosa Blue Plantainlily (Hosta coerulea)  
This plant produces dark-blue flowers on 30-inch stalks in mid-summer. It has dark green foliage that will tolerate much sunlight with little fading.