

The Magic and Mystery of Hostas!

By Dave Dunn

Rideau Woodland Ramble

For more years than I can remember, my imagination has been captured by Hostas. This fantastic perennial has been the favorite plant among gardeners for some time. It's such a simple straight forward plan....give it its basic requirements, and it definitely will reward you, with almost no effort on your part.

Hosta are leafy lush perennials that generally thrive in shade to part sun. They are sought after for their leaves, and their ability to thrive in shade, although, every year there are new introductions whose flowers are extremely fragrant, adding to the mix. These plants come in tiny form, like **Hosta Blue Mouse Ears**, or **Hosta Tiny Tears**, to gigantic, such as **Hosta Blue Umbrellas**, **Hosta Sum and Substance**, or **Hosta Old Faithful**. They can be used as edger's, or as large specimens, taking a special place of prominence in the garden.

The most striking feature of Hosta are the fabulous range of colour variation, and leaf type. They range through greens, blues, gold, and variegated forms. The leaves can be puckered, wrinkled, shiny, smooth, heavily veined and so on. Their stems can be green, or red. It is this immense range that drives collectors crazy, and starts one on the quest to have all the latest Hosta in your collection. There are probably 500 named varieties available, and thousands listed in the journals.

Hosta love rich soil and moist conditions. They do best in shade, but some can tolerate sun if given continuous access to moisture .One surprising fact is that certain Hosta that tolerate both conditions, look like different plants when put in shade or sun. Try **Hosta Paul's Glory**, or **Hosta June**. In each case they do well, but look very different, with creams and blues in the shade, and sharper contrast with gold in the sun. It is fun to experiment.

In a woodland setting, Hosta, Ferns and Astilbe are a great combination, along with Heuchera, and various other woodland plants. Combinations of color and contrasting forms create real drama in the garden. The Hosta that tends to have a great deal of white variegation is a great way to lighten up a shady spot. For this use, consider, **Hosta Night Before Christmas**, or **Hosta Patriot**.

Hostas grow in a clump that gets larger every year. They are very easy to propagate by dividing these clumps. This is best done early in spring when the eyes are visible, but the leaves have not fully unfurled. But remember, while one mature plant will yield many offspring, Hostas need to grow old to exhibit all the traits they are capable....so leave some large specimens as a clump and let them age to perfection.

Hostas do not like long term exposure to acidic conditions. If they are competing with conifers (spruce, pine, cedar) it's best to give them some garden lime from time to time.

These treatments will avoid seeing them wane over time, and allow them to maintain their characteristic vigor.

These are perennials that die down to the ground each year. Hosta all have different schedules in the spring, and when they reappear, they do so at their own timing, heightened by the temperature of that part of the garden. If you are wondering where your favorite Hosta is in the spring, give it time, it will reappear with the heat of the spring!

The Hosta of the Year for 2005 is one called **Hosta “Striptease”**. This is a beautiful hosta that I have described as having a very “architectural” or controlled variegation. It’s a very distinctive plant that must be seen to be believed!

So, add some magic and mystery to your garden. Take a look at Hostas, but be careful, the collecting bug is a real risk for this amazing perennial.

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RWR is known for the huge collection of Hosta in its Gardens and available at the nursery.



