HOSTA CARE TIPS

Most hostas are relatively care free & can be left undisturbed for many years with nothing more than a minor sprinkling of fertilizer once a year. It takes two to three years for a hosta to exhibit mature characteristics. Hostas are also very winter hardy. Below is some information that may be helpful in insuring a stunning hosta garden.

PLANTING A HOSTA

A hole should be dug similar to planting a tree in that you want the hole to be proportional to the size of the hosta so that the roots can be spread out instead of clumped together, giving plenty of soil around each root. Most hostas perform best in soils with plenty of humus & regular moisture, but are tolerant of a wide range of soil conditions. If possible, work some organic matter in the bottom of the hole before filling the remainder with garden soil. We plant hostas so that the top of the crown (where the leaves come out of) is about 2 inches below the soil surface and just below the surface for miniature to small hostas. We then sprinkle about a tablespoon of a well balanced slow release fertilizer around the newly planted hosta, being careful not to get any on the leaves which could lead to minor leaf burn. Most varieties of hostas can also be grown attractively in containers or pots without replanting for two to three or more years given a proper container size, frequent watering, & fertilizing. Hostas are hardy USDA Zones 3 to 9.

WHERE TO PLANT

One of the many great attributes of hostas is that almost all hostas do great in shade where other plants would struggle. Although, a few such as Plantagenia, actually appreciate some sun to achieve it's wonderful large fragrant blooms. However, most hostas perform best when there is a limited amount of direct or filtered sun during the day. In most cases, early day sun to about mid-morning & late afternoon sun after 5pm will not burn your hosta leaves. A few varieties of hostas that are mostly white, such as Fire and Ice & Pandora's Box, need a bit of sunlight for vigor. Hostas do not perform well when planted far underneath an eave or completely covered area of a house as this blocks out all UV light from the sun.

WHEN TO PLANT

Hostas can be planted from containers about any time of the year that the ground is workable & limited risk of frost heaving. If planting bare root divisions, the best time to plant is spring or fall, however in areas of the country where the night time temperatures drop down into the 50’s or less, you can plant all summer long with little to no problems. When you split or divide your hostas, avoid doing so in the heat of summer, especially in hot humid areas such as the Midwest or Southern states.

NUTRIENTS

Our best results have been with a slow release, Osmocote type fertilizer in early spring just before the shoots emerge from the ground. We use a generic brand of slow release, 12-10-10 which has worked quite well, just sprinkle a small amount; about a tablespoon, on all but the smallest hostas which you may want to half the amount. For optimal results it is recommended that you have a soil test done to see what your soil is lacking before deciding what to fertilize with. We have also found great results with composted manure. Since it is composted, it can be placed around the crowns of hosta without burning. Note that hostas like slightly acidic soil.

WATERING

For optimum growth we recommend one to two inches of water a week which is about average for most perennials. If hostas do not receive sufficient water, they will begin to go dormant. The plant will wilt followed by a browning and then loss of leaves. This is your plants way of conserving energy and protecting the crown from death. But, if the soil is perpetually soggy, this can create rot. The most critical time to water consistently for successful growing is when hostas break dormancy in spring & when they begin the dormancy process in early fall.

PESTS

The most common pests a hosta will encounter are snails and slugs. A somewhat water resistant bait has given us excellent results in controlling their population & keeping them off the hostas. The two best times to bait is in October & February, this will greatly increase the kill rate for season, as there is usually a warmer, dry period in the month when the slugs come out looking for food & lay eggs. Keep in mind pets when using slug bait. Slugs and snails tend to prefer hostas that have relatively thin leaves over the thicker leaved varieties such as blue hostas which have a waxy coating on the leaves that these pests don’t seem to like. Also, deer may give hostas a try while foraging. Deer that do eat hostas seem to prefer hosta with thinner leaf substance. There is a large array of ways of keeping deer away & repellents available. We have found that Deer Out has been very effective as it doesn’t wash off from water or rain, last up to four months and doesn’t stink like most repellents.

DIVIDING HOSTAS

A clump of hosta begins to show its mature characteristics after three years and should be fully mature at five years. We do not divide our display hostas, as each year they are left undisturbed, they look more and more stunning. Hostas can be divided about any time of the year in more temperate climates where the summers are warm but the nights cool off such as our western Oregon climate. If you live in an area that gets hot and humid summers such as the Midwest & southern states, it is recommended that you split your plants in spring or wait until the summer heat begins to fade & the night time temperatures begin to fall back. If you try to divide your hostas under hot, humid conditions, you may have problems with crown rot. To divide your hostas use a sharp knife to cut through the basal plate of hard tissue between the foliage & roots. Divisions are best when an eye is left with some basal plate & roots. Then this can be planted. It is a great way to increase the stock you have for mass plantings with a limited purchase or to share your hosta with friends.

YEARLY GROWTH CYCLE

Hostas begin to go dormant in September here in Western Oregon & are fully dormant by Thanksgiving. Temperatures play a major role in how fast they go dormant. It is best to leave them be until the leaves have lost all coloration as this is when they have stopped storing sugar. Then, you can pull off the dead leaves or let them turn into compost through the winter. We clean our pots and display beds in late fall to early winter as it is one less place for slugs to hide & gives a clean look to the winter beds. Hostas in the ground begin to emerge here in late March & are fully developed by mid May.