



## GOING FOR THE GOLD—GOLD HOSTAS

minutes chatting with me about gardening or has visited my garden knows that my favorite plant for shade gardens is the hosta. Hostas sit on their deserved pedestals because they are low-maintenance, reliable, and beautiful. Perfect as a focal point in the landscape, massed in large groupings, or used in combination with shrubs, annuals, or other perennials, no shade garden is complete without hostas.

As gardeners mature with their gardens they realize that flowers alone do not make a satisfying garden. Sure they add a big splash of color when they are in bloom but once flowers have faded, what 's left?

Foliage plants are vital to a pleasing design, and hostas are the royal family of foliage plants. But which member of the family should you welcome into your landscape?

There are thousands of varieties of hostas, and their foliage varies from cultivar to cultivar. Hosta foliage comes in different shapes and sizes, leaf textures and edges, and colors.

Anyone who spends more than a few minutes chatting with me about gardening or has visited my garden knows that my favorite plant for shade gardens is the hosta. Hostas sit on their deserved pedestals because they are low-maintenance, reliable, and beautiful. Perfect as a focal point in the landscape, massed in large groupings, or used in combination with shrubs, annuals, or other perennials, no shade garden is complete without hostas.

Leaves can be long and narrow, oval, wedge-shaped, heart-shaped or round. The size of hosta leaves range from the size of a thumbnail to larger than the size of a dinner plate.

Leaf textures may be smooth, corrugated, or furrowed; leaf edges can be flat, cupped, wavy, or twisted. All of these qualities give hosta distinct characteristics, but most people love hostas for their colorful foliage. Hosta leaves can be light to dark green, blue, blue-gray, chartreuse, gold, cream, white, or any combination of these.

With so many choices how do you know which hosta is the perfect variety for your garden?



While all hostas are beautiful, in this article, gold hostas are in the spotlight. They brighten up a shady spot in the garden and blend well with other shade-loving perennials or hostas of other colors - especially blue, dark green, or hostas with gold

centers or margins.

The first hosta with gold foliage was introduced in the late 1960s but it took many years before gold hostas were readily available for the public to purchase. A hosta is genetically determined to be gold by genes that block or slow the production of chlorophyll. The lack of chlorophyll makes the leaves appear yellow in different degrees.

Generally gold hostas require some direct sunlight to achieve their best color. When sited in too much sun, however, leaves will scorch and be papery white. If they are placed in too much shade, they will be chartreuse. It may take a move or two to find the perfect place in the garden.

Generally, hostas demand very little from the gardener. Plant them in a well-drained but moisture-retentive soil amended with organic matter. If you want hostas to reach their ultimate, sumptuous size give them supplemental water especially in the spring and the fall. Feed them some slow-release fertilizer in the spring and they will reward you with lush growth.

Here is a small sample of the many gold hostas now available:

**Small hostas – up to 12 ” tall**

Gold Edger has small, heart-shaped leaves that form a dense mound. This hosta grows fast – use it as a groundcover to brighten a partly shady area.

Little Aurora has bright gold, heart-shaped foliage that becomes corrugated with maturity. This hosta is a perfect when used as an edging plant or to create a ribbon of gold in your shady border.

Maui Buttercups also has bright gold foliage, but its leaves are round, deeply cupped, and corrugated. Partner this cutie with yellow Corydalis (Corydalis lutea) and the golden leaves of the hosta will be the perfect foil for the small, bright yellow, tubular flowers of the corydalis.

Any of these smaller hostas are perfectly suited for a shady rock garden. They are also good candidates for container plantings where the golden foliage not only adds color, but also a bold presence.

**Medium hostas – 12 ” to 23 ” tall.**

August Moon is one of the oldest hosta cultivars and remains popular year after year. It has large, bright gold, oval, corru-

gated leaves; and it has a good growth rate. Combine with male ferns (Dryopteris filix-mas) and enjoy the contrast of its dark green, lacy fronds.

Fort Knox is another medium variety with thick, heart-shaped foliage. Plant this hosta in front of a grouping of yellow wax bells (Kirengeshoma palmate). The gold leaves of the hosta will shine in front of the maple-like foliage of the yellow wax bells. When it blooms, the bell-shaped flowers will harmonize beautifully.

Heartache also has thick, heart-shaped foliage, but the bright purple flowers make this variety distinctive. The Heartache in my garden is growing appropriately next to the hosta, Striptease, in my own garden. Who says gardening can ’t be fun?

**Large hostas – over 24 ” tall**

Gold Regal has large, oval-shaped leaves that form impressive, vase-shaped mounds. Growing up to 32 ” tall and 5 ’ wide, it is perfect as a specimen in the shade garden.

Sun Power also forms a remarkable mound of wavy, bright gold foliage. It grows up to 28 ” tall and 5 ’ wide. Use this hosta as

a focal point. Sum and Substance is the most impressive hosta in my gardens. It has the largest leaves of any other hosta in my collection. Foliage is thick and slightly cup downwards. Give this imposing beauty room – it grows up to 3 ’ tall and 6 ’ wide! I have planted a grouping of bugbane ( Cimicifuga ramosa ‘ Atropurpurea ’ ) nearby and am pleased with this combination. The vertical, open habit of the bugbane plays nicely with the large, broad hosta foliage.

When looking for companion plants for hostas, don ’t forget Coral Bells. They make stunning combinations. When combining these two dramatic foliage plants, who needs flowers?

Gold hostas are like most things in life – great in moderation; not as good when used in excess. Use gold hostas as accents or focal points in the landscape where they will combine nicely with other hostas or shade-loving perennials. As an edging, they draw the eye along the garden.

But an all-gold hosta garden may look monotonous and when gold hostas are used haphazardly, the garden may look blotchy.