



THE GENUS HIBISCUS

When summer turns up the heat and the pansies are starting to look peaked, turn to Hibiscus for some colorful help. These heat-loving beauties are at their prime during mid to late summer, and their large, exotic looking blooms add a showy splash of brilliance to almost any sunny location. Choose from tropical, perennial or woody species—all are sure to brighten up your patio, garden or landscape.

Tropical Species

Sometimes known as Hawaiian Hibiscus or Chinese Hibiscus, these handsome, glossy-leaved plants are perfect for container culture on a sunny patio or deck. Their brilliant funnel-shaped flowers are four or five inches across, and are available in many shades of red, pink, yellow or white, all with showy, prominent stamens. Their bushy, rounded habit is an added bonus, staying neat and attractive throughout the summer. Sometimes these tropical varieties are available in a tree form, and they make an impressive statement in large urns, flanking a doorway, or as a focal point in a grouping of patio pots.

Tropical species can be mixed with other plants, too, in a large container or in the landscape. Some are grown more for their foliage than for their flowers. Hibiscus acetosella 'Red Shield' is a gorgeous, deep purple-leaved variety that provides marvelous contrast to green-leaved annuals or perennials.

With full sun, these Hibiscus are not difficult to care for. Water regularly and fertilize monthly during the growing season. Although the tropical species are not hardy here, it is possible to over-winter them indoors in a bright location. Be sure to acclimatize your plants before bringing them inside by moving them to a shadier location for several days before the move. It is also a good idea to spray them with an insecticidal soap to be sure you aren't bringing in any unwanted critters, like whiteflies or aphids. Once indoors for the winter, provide humidity with a humidifier or by grouping plants together. Water sparingly and do not fertilize until you start seeing new growth in late winter or early spring. After all danger of frost is over, reintroduce your plants to the outside, again acclimatizing them in a shady, protected spot before moving them to the full sun.

Perennial Species

Although Hibiscus moscheutos, or Rose Mallow, is related to the tropical species, it is a hardy perennial here and is actually native to the East Coast. What it shares with its more tender relatives is a love of warm temperatures and very showy flowers—*huge* flowers. Depending on the variety, the blossoms of this Hibiscus can be up to 12 inches across! Flowers are borne from mid summer until frost, and may be red, pink, purple, white or yellow; some are bicolored. The lobed leaves are large, too, and give the plants a bold texture. Leave lots of room for this impressive perennial. Plant it at the back of a border, as a specimen or focal point, or as a summertime screening plant—it grows up to six feet tall. Because of its large size and imposing look, this Hibiscus is a good choice to mix into the shrub border, as well.

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Despite its tall stature, Perennial Hibiscus does not need staking. Its sturdy stems stand upright, even in windy areas. It prefers full sun and an organic soil, and tolerates moist conditions. Do remember that—like its tropical relatives—it loves warm temperatures. It will be among the last of the perennials to emerge in the spring.

A few of the many excellent varieties of this plant include:

- * ' Lord Baltimore '—A classic, with deep red flowers to 12 inches across over dark green foliage, 4 to 5 feet tall
- * ' Old Yella '—Soft yellow, slightly ruffled 10 to 12-inch flowers and green foliage, 3 to 4 feet tall
- * ' Kopper King '—White flowers to 12 inches, have red eye; copper-colored foliage, 3 to 4 feet tall
- * ' Turn of the Century '—Bicolored flowers are shades of red and pink, lending this plant a pinwheel effect over dark green foliage, 6 to 8 feet tall