

NATIONAL PLANT COLLECTION®

***Hosta* (small and miniature)**

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HABIT & CULTIVATION

Hosta are clump-forming perennials that grow on moist, forest margins; but can be found in crevices of volcanic cliff walls too. Grown mainly for their foliage, the flowers are often also attractive. In the wild, temperatures can remain below freezing for many weeks which brings on complete dormancy. As such they are very hardy, and normally grow well in the UK. Small and mini hostas grow best in pots, using a compost mix that allows a lot of air near the root system. This can be achieved with a mix of grit, grit-sand, perlite and coarse compost. During the dormant period the compost should be kept moist, but not wet as this can lead to crown rot and death of the plant. The plants are kept in an unheated greenhouse over winter. Over time the plants should be re-potted as needed, if it is difficult to squeeze the sides of the pot then it's time to go up to the next size of pot.

DEFINITION of SMALL & MINIATURE *HOSTA*

The size categories in mature *Hosta* are defined by the leaf area (length by width). The American Hosta Society classifies small *Hosta* as having a leaf area greater than 10 square inches but less than 25 square inches, but no more than 14 inches high (360mm). A miniature *Hosta* has a leaf area of less than 6 square inches with height no more than 8 inches (200 mm).

PROPAGATION

Hosta are propagated by division in spring, just as the plants begin to appear above ground. With most plants this can be done every 3-5 years depending on the growth of the plant. However PLEASE NOTE! with small and miniature plants the roots are small, so splitting your plant before it is mature (less than 3-5 years.old) will kill both divisions. Commercial growers use cloning (tissue culture) to propagate plants quickly and cheaply for sale in large quantities.

PESTS & DISEASES

The usual pests are snails, slugs and vine weevil; which feed on leaves or roots. Snails sleep during the winter, emerging next spring; slugs can be active all year, and vine weevil grubs eat their way through the root system. These pests live in your garden, but do not travel very far; getting rid of them will lessen attacks for next year. As an alternative to using chemical controls in the growing season, get a torch and go into your garden when it's dark (if it's damp, so much the better). Using the torch to see, (not to squash them with...!) pick the slugs and snails off the plant leaves and put them into a large container. You can then recycle your pests by feeding them to chickens or ducks as their flavour isn't affected.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Hosta are native to Japan, Korea & China, where they have been cultivated and bred for many hundreds of years. The first record of the plants in Europe was from Engelbert Kaempfer (1651- 1715) who made drawings of some he saw when stationed off the coast of Japan. The first plant to reach Europe was *Hosta plantaginea*, sent in seed form to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, from Macao in 1785; this helped start the popularity of the genus as a garden display plant. Philip von Siebold working for the Dutch East India Company was responsible for shipments which were sent throughout Europe from 1829 onwards - some reaching America. The *hosta* enjoyed popularity in the US, with Thomas Hogg Jr, a US Marshall probably sending back many plants to his family nursery while stationed in Japan.