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Hostas: Made for Shade!  
Growing Hostas in Pots in the Sierra Foothills  
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Easy-to-grow, shade-tolerant hosta (Family Asparagaceae: Hosta) plants are indeed made for shade. Imagine a perennial, leafy green woodland garden featuring plants of striking colors, shapes, textures, and fragrances. If your yard has some shade trees that provide at least partial shade, hostas in pots will make your shade gardening dreams come true!

Native to northeast Asia, hostas received their name in honor of Austrian botanist, Nicholas Host, in 1812. Hosta is a genus of plants commonly known as hostas, plantain lilies, and occasionally by the Japanese name of giboshi.

My obsession with hostas began as I grew up in the Midwest, near Lake Michigan. Our tree-shaded yard had many hostas. This was the perfect combination of right plant in the right place. When I moved to California 20 years ago, I quickly learned that I needed to adjust the way I care for these plants.

Living in the Sierra Foothills, my small, oak-tree-shaded yard is rocky hardpan, so I opted to create an island garden on my sloping front yard. For hardscape, I used excavated rocks and pebbles. Then I filled the space with pots of hostas and other shade-loving plants. Hostas are hardy in zones 3-9. They remain leafy and vibrant summer through fall and go dormant in winter. Don't worry -- these long-lived plants sprout back in spring, better than ever.

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Planting hostas in pots is easy as 1, 2, 3.

- 1) Purchase a small hosta and select a somewhat larger pot; your plant will thrive, mature, and grow quickly over the next few seasons. Avoid metal and small pots that retain heat and dry out too quickly. Plastic pots are fine. Make sure the pot has adequate drainage.
- 2) Combine a slow-release fertilizer with a light, organic potting mixture. Follow the recommended amount of fertilizer on the package for your container size.
- 3) Add the prepared potting mix to the pot. Position the plant so that the crown is 1-2 inches below the soil line, and 2 inches beneath the pot rim. Spread the roots out and fill in with potting mix until the hosta is planted at the same depth it was growing at previously. Then water, water, water. Give your pots a good morning soaking in summer. Remember, hostas can't tolerate full sun, so place them in a shady spot.

Propagation by division is easy and will supply you with new plants to keep or share. Gently remove the plant clump from the pot. If necessary, use a sharp garden knife to separate the plant, or shake or tease the roots carefully to divide the plant. Make sure each new plant has a viable root system.

As far as pests go, slugs, snails, deer and rabbits like hostas almost as much as people do. Keep this in mind if you see bunnies or deer wandering close to your shade garden. Welcome visitors include hummingbirds and bees.

Now for the fun part-- choosing hostas for your garden. They range in size from giant elephant ears to tiny mouse ears. *Hosta* 'Sum and Substance' has huge, corrugated, chartreuse leaves and lavender flowers on tall stems. *Hosta* 'Blue Mouse Ears' is adorable and aptly named. Unusual *Hosta* 'Praying Hands' and 'Curly Fries' have slender twisted leaves. *Hosta* 'Guacamole' is big and beautiful with fragrant flowers. *Hosta* 'Abiquiu Drinking Gourd' is heavily corrugated and shaped like an unruly cup. The possibilities when choosing a favorite are limitless.

References:

The Color Encyclopedia of Hostas, Diane Grenfell and Michael Shadrack, 2004.

Farmers Almanac 2020 "Growing Hostas: How to Plant, Grow and Care For Hostas", 2020.

Better Homes & Gardens Magazine "Expert Tips To An Ultimate Hosta Garden".

Sunset Western Garden Book, "Woodland Paradise", p. 312, 2001.

The Spruce Magazine, "Hosta Plant Profile", Angela England, 10/05/2019.

Join us for Waterwise Gardening Part 2, a Zoom online class on July 22 at 6:30 p.m. (Part 1 has been recorded if you missed it.) Using water wisely is an important part of sustainable gardening in California! Learn how to improve the water resiliency and health of your garden while making it easier to manage. More information on this series and other MG online classes, plus a link to register are available at:

[http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public\\_Education\\_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Public_Education_Classes/?calendar=yes&g=56698)

Currently we are in phase 2 resumption of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future be limited. Please see our calendar of events for

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learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge.

We do have some good news--the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public, from 9 AM to noon on Fridays and Saturdays. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check [http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration\\_Garden](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden) for more information.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: [mgeldorado.ucanr.edu](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu). We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news).