

Tale from the Garden!

The Hosta is an old friend for which I make no apologies. I have a number of pots in my garden with this plant & they are emerging from the soil right now, first as a tiny spike & then gradually the leaves unfurling into a magnificent clump of foliage. I don't do anything, apart from cutting back the dead leaves at the end of their season, but they keep on coming back year after year, reliably & just as impressive. They're long-lived and low-maintenance, just like any good friendship.

Hostas are prized primarily for their foliage and are deservedly popular. These resilient and easy-to-grow plants are available in a wide range of leaf colours, sizes and shapes, and are also valued for their attractive, often scented, summer flowers. Thriving in light and medium shade, they're incredibly useful plants. Both flowers and foliage are as favoured by the flower arranger as the gardener.



Hosta foliage is perfect for cutting. With so many different colours and textures available in the genus you can add silver, variegated, heart-shapes, crinkly or smooth leaves to a flower arrangement. Hostas flower in summer, bearing purple or white blooms on tall stems. Hosta flowers can be quite pretty but they can look tatty after a few days – many gardeners remove hosta flowers so they can make the most of the foliage display.



Hostas are native to Japan, Korea and China. Documentation of its use as a popular garden plant, as food, as a medicinal herb and as a source for aromatics goes back centuries to the Han Dynasty. Hosta 'plantaginea' was the first hosta known on the continent of Europe in the 1780s and was first grown there under glass for its rare tropical attributes. In China, the decorative part of a woman's hairpin is often made of jade shaped similar to the unopened flower bud of Hosta 'plantaginea'. Chinese folklore has a legend that a goddess dropped her hairpin from which this beautiful hosta grew - confirming the presence and love for this hosta among the Chinese.

With more than 6,000 named varieties out there and thousands of plants sold each year, it's pretty safe to say that hostas are among the most popular garden perennials. They're loved because of the way they seem to pop up out of nowhere in the spring when we're not looking, how they add luxuriant foliage to shady spaces, and because of all the different colours, textures, flowers, and leaf shapes and forms. Their magnificent leaves may be plain or variegated, and range from dark blue to darkest green, and from gold and cream to butter yellow and chartreuse, many boasting contrasting markings and attractive margin combinations. The size of mature leaves can vary from pencil to dinner plate and the texture can be smooth or corrugated, shiny or matt.

"I love slugs," said no one ever. The recipe of warm days + ample moisture + tasty hosta leaves are like ringing the dinner bell.

Slugs aren't everybody's favourite dinner guest! They can cause damage throughout the year on a wide range of plants, but seedlings and new growth on herbaceous plants in spring are most at risk. Slugs are gastropods; single-shelled, soft-bodied animals in the mollusc group of animals. Slugs can use their rasping tongues to make holes in leaves, stems, buds, seedlings & other soft growth, flowers, roots, corms, tubers and bulbs of many ornamental plants & vegetables. Most slugs feed at night, and the slime trails, if present, can alert you to the level of activity. Damage is usually most severe during warm humid periods.

There are many home-grown deterrents from pine needles and slug traps to copper pennies and beer trays, but the best place to start is by eliminating places slugs can hide. Rake up fallen leaves. And, think about planting varieties with thicker, heavily textured leaves that are more slug resistant. But while there are many control options available for slugs, despite this, they remain a persistent pest.

However, consider this ... slugs are an important part of a complex food chain. Having them in your garden encourages visits from valuable critters such as birds, beetles, toads and slow worms, all of which will eat large quantities of slugs or snails, and also stay to contribute to the overall health of your garden. Maybe they're not such a bad dinner guest after all!

It's no surprise then, that Hostas symbolize friendship and devotion. You may have never considered giving one to someone as a gift, but you might want to give them a second look the next time you're shopping for a friend that likes to garden.

Friendship is truly one of the greatest gifts in life. In our friends we find trusted companions who know us and love us for who we are, no matter what. Friendship can also be challenging and messy, as it takes a lot of work to keep relationships with friends happy and healthy, but our friends are the people who get us through rough times - the people who very often come to us with compassion. They always seem to have the right words to help us. Our friends can be a great source of love, joy and encouragement. When we find ourselves taking these very important relationships for granted, we should look to the Good Book for a little reminder about how important our friends are.

We all need friends. When the storm clouds gather, we cherish those people who we know we can turn to, who will always be there with a hug, a kind word, or a shoulder to cry on if we need it. The Bible is filled with inspiring stories about people of faith who supported each other in times of trouble. One of the most powerful friendships in the New Testament is between Paul and Barnabas. Together they launched the first missionary journey and they were a great church-planting team. For just over two years, they planted over a dozen congregations. On their secondary missionary journey, Paul suggested they take John Mark and the two men had "a sharp disagreement" (Acts 15:36) and ended up going on separate journeys. However, despite their disagreement these two friends continued to have respect for each other.

Faith and friendship go hand in hand, after all.

John 15:13 "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." **The Message:** The sacrifice of Jesus represents the ultimate act of friendship

Ruth 1:16 "But Ruth said. . . 'Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'" **The Message:** Widowed Ruth leaves her home and family to travel to a foreign land with her mother-in-law Naomi, one of the Bible's most stirring examples of loyal friendship.

John 13:34-35 "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The Message: The most fundamental message of Jesus is that we must love and care for one another.

Proverbs 17:9 "One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend."

The Message: Be kind and forgiving and you will have many devoted friends; hold grudges and you will lose them.

John 15:15 "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father."

The Message: Through our knowledge and worship of the Lord, we become not just his disciples, but also his friends.

John 21:15 "When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'"

The Message: The message of the risen Lord to Peter is unequivocal: If you love me, you must tend to those in need.

Genesis 34:21 "These people are friendly with us; let them live in the land and trade in it, for the land is large enough for them; let us take their daughters in marriage, and let us give them our daughters."

The Message: Friendship encourages peace; the earth is large enough to accommodate us all.

What a shame the people of Israel & Palestine can't learn to live alongside each other with respect despite their disagreements. Once again, the tensions between Israel and Palestine have reached the news cycle & hundreds of innocent children & families are caught up in the middle of war. We pray for the peacemakers in that area. Hold them from despair, give them the energy and vision for a better future that will keep them going during these difficult times. Help the local politicians and those in the international community who are trying to mediate and resolve this crisis. Equip them with the skills they need, give them the words that will speak into this situation and help those who need to hear listen to their words and cease their fire. Lord, in a dark hour, **let your light shine.**