



GROWING VERY SMALL & MINIATURE HOSTAS IN CONTAINERS

WHAT IS A MINIATURE HOSTA?

The American Hosta Society defines a miniature as any hosta with a leaf blade size of 6 square inches or less (leaf width x leaf length). Further expansion of the definition by other hosta experts is a leaf length of no longer than 4.5 inches and a mature clump height of 6 inches or less.

Another classification, not recognized by the American Hosta Society, but still useful, is very small hosta. The dimensions are generally defined as a leaf blade size of greater than 6 square inches but less than 10 square inches, a leaf length of under 6 inches and a mature clump height of 6 to 10 inches.

In general, miniature and very small hostas require more care than regular sized hostas. A rule of thumb is the smaller the plant the more demanding and difficult it is to grow. The tiniest hostas with large areas of white on their leaves are particularly challenging and are probably best left to the experts.

CONTAINERS

Correct container size is important. Hostas, particularly smaller hostas, do not do well in excessively large containers. It is better to err on the side of a little too small and have hostas root bound than to over-pot. When deciding container depth keep in mind that miniature hostas require at least 5 inches of planting depth for the roots; some of the larger or more vigorous ones may require more space. Hosta roots grow laterally so it is better if the container's width is greater than the height. Containers with sloping sides have less room for plant roots at the edges so containers with straight sides are preferable. Be sure your pots have lots of drainage holes to allow water to flow out and permit oxygen to flow in. Don't overfill your containers with soil, leave at 1-2 inches of between the top of the pot and the soil level. In our area, containers need to be frost proof to withstand the rigors of winter.

SOIL MIX

Mini hostas hate wet feet so a free draining soil mix is an absolute must. Use a high quality, commercial potting mix which you can amend with garden compost. Also add an inorganic particulate such as perlite, vermiculite or builder's sand to further improve drainage. Never use garden soil.

LOCATION

Hostas need some sun for good growth and leaf coloration. The best sites get morning sun (until around 9:00-10:00 am) and then are shaded for the rest of the day. Also good are areas with dappled shade all day. Avoid locating your containers in deep shade or in areas that get full mid-day sun. One of the advantages of growing in containers is that you can re-locate them to better locations in your garden as the sun and shade patterns change over the season.

MAINTENANCE DURING THE GROWING SEASON

Outside of applying a light coverage of slow-release fertilizer in late May, the main activity during the growing season is watering. If there is no appreciable rainfall, pots will generally need to be watered every other day and every day during the hottest part of the summer. Check your containers regularly for weeds, slug damage and reversions on variegated hostas (these need to be removed immediately or you will quickly have a plain leaved plant!)

REPOTTING

You should plan on re-potting your mini-hostas every 2-3 years. Potting soil becomes compacted and loses nutrients over time. The best time to re-pot hostas is when they are actively making roots, in the spring after the first flush of leaves has hardened off and in late summer once the hottest weather has passed. In the Chicago area, this is mid- to late May and late August. Re-potting in late summer/early fall must be done at least 6 weeks before our first frost date (usually mid-late October)

OVERWINTERING CONTAINERS

Preparing for Winter Storage

When we get our first light frosts, typically mid-October, start preparing your hostas for winter storage. Begin removing dead and dying foliage, do not cut back when the leaves are still green. It is best to reduce watering at this time. You want your hostas to go into winter storage slightly dry. By the beginning of November your hostas should be dormant and their containers moved into winter storage locations.

Winter Storage

The more vigorous mini and very small hostas can be overwintered outside in their containers (assuming the containers are frost proof). Huddle your containers together and place them in an area protected from winter winds & away from frost pockets, cover them with a good layer of light mulch (leaves or straw are best). If you place them next to the house or other building be sure your plants are not in the roof dripline. Provide additional protection by surrounding the containers with straw bales or bagged leaves. Avoid southern exposures, the containers may warm up too quickly when we get our infamous 'warming spells' in February and early March that are quickly followed by plummeting temperatures. Alternatively, you can bury your containers in the ground. Just be sure the area you select has excellent drainage. Empty vegetable beds or holding beds are good places to sink you pots.

Another option, and the best choice for the more delicate and finicky minis, is to store the containers in an unheated garage, shed, sun porch, or greenhouse. You will need to check the soil periodically and water (sparingly) when necessary to prevent the roots from drying out. Do not water if the rootball is frozen, that is a sure way to kill a plant.

Whatever you do, do not try to over-winter hostas as houseplants. They need a cold (40 degrees or less), dormant period of at least 6 weeks.

Bringing Out of Dormancy

In early April begin moving mulch away from the tops of the hostas you overwintered outdoors. These hostas don't need special care except to insure all the mulch is off the crowns before new growth starts. Don't move them out of their protected area until the night time temperatures are consistently above 40 degrees. Make sure to water as needed.

Hostas stored in unheated indoor areas need more attention. Monitor them closely and increase watering as needed. As the weather warms (above 45 degrees) you can start to bring them out during the day and move them back in at night. You cannot leave these containers outside overnight until night time temperatures are consistently above 40 degrees; in our area this is usually late April.

Please note that very small and mini hostas are notoriously late to show any growth until around mid-April and will usually not start growing vigorously until mid to late May. Be patient.

Good Sources of Information

American Hosta Society Database <https://www.hostaregistrar.org/search.php> | Host Library <http://www.hostalibrary.org/> (*this is not a secure site*) | "The Book of Little Hostas" by Kathy Guest Shadrack & Michael Shadrack

TWENTY MINIATURE AND VERY SMALL HOSTAS FOR CONTAINER GARDENS

1. Appletini
2. Blue Mouse Ears
3. Cracker Crumbs
4. Dragon Tails
5. Frosted Mouse Ears
6. Hacksaw
7. Hanky Panky
8. Lakeside Zinger
9. Lemon Lime
10. Limey Lisa
11. Little Wonder
12. Mini Skirt
13. Pandora's Box
14. Pixie Vamp
15. Plug Nickel
16. School Mouse
17. Tongue Twister
18. True Heart
19. Venusta (this is a species hosta)
20. Woodland Elf