



Hosta hardiness

Just how hardy are hostas when grown in the UK?

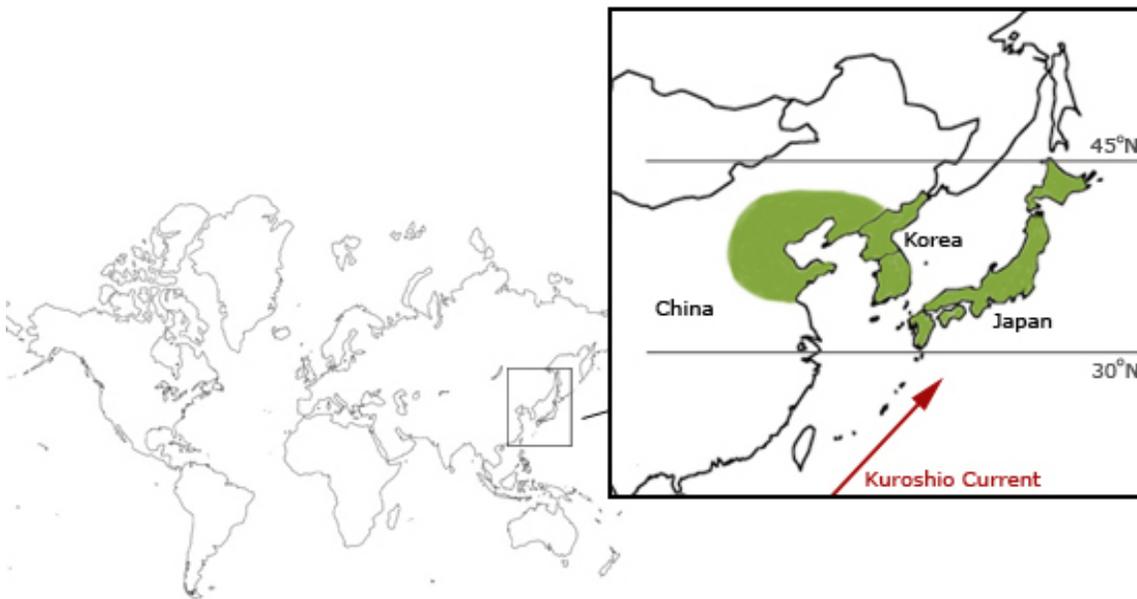
This month we share our insights into looking after your hostas over the winter, whilst indulging a little in the traditional British obsession with the weather!

Wild populations

A good place to start with an assessment of hosta hardiness is with wild populations.

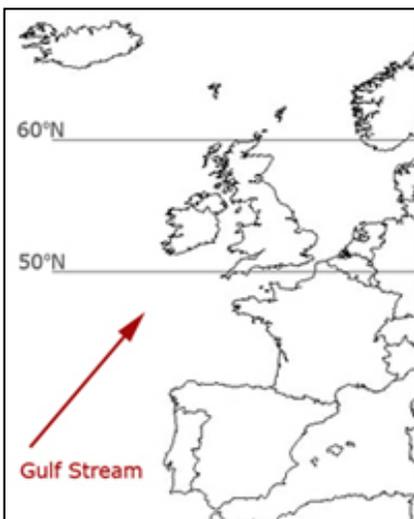
Although hostas have become popular and widely grown throughout the world, most species originated in east Asia, specifically central-north eastern China, Korea and Japan.

The map below illustrates the key locations:



The most important point to note is that this region of the world lies in the same 'temperate' zone as Europe and North America.

The UK sits between 50°-60° N, which is further north but our weather is greatly influenced by the Gulf Stream, which makes us more temperate than we would otherwise be. Indeed, the Gulf Stream helps make the border counties and Scotland particularly good locations to grow hostas.



In turn, New Zealand, another key location for the cultivation of hostas, lies 40°-50° S and is blessed with the warmth of the East Australian Current. The major hosta-growing areas of the world share several characteristics:

Coastal location

Most regions are close to coasts, indeed many are islands. This improves the temperate nature of the climates experienced, there tends to be more variation in the weather and less tendency to extremes of intense cold or heat.

Warmer waters

The coastal waters off Japan, Korea and China share the benefit of the Kuroshio Current, which is a warm ocean surface current rather like the Gulf Stream, which warms our North Atlantic coastline in the UK.

Just for the sake of it...

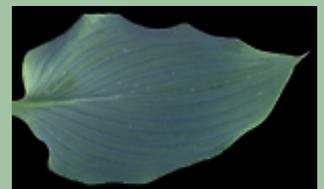
Here are some of our favourite hostas with topical names:



H. 'Spring Fling'



H. 'Summer Serenade'



H. 'Arctic Blast' (sorry)



H. 'Whirlwind'



H. 'Winter Snow'

Good rainfall

Although some of these areas suffer greater extremes of rainfall, often in damaging deluges due to seasonal monsoons and typhoons, the important point is that the weather is generally alternately wet and dry - neither extreme prevails, at least not at the current time.

But, what about North America?

As ever, it is the exceptions that prove the rule and perhaps the largest anomaly in this assessment is North America. Hostas grow well in the US, which is probably the biggest generalisation of this issue, and certainly an understatement. This vast land mass experiences very differing climates, and extremes of hot and cold. However, there is a lot of variation, even in the central states, and regional micro-climates obviously provide all that hostas need to flourish, as they are grown in all but the most arid of states.

As hosta growth is highly environment dependent, perhaps we should not be surprised that slightly colder or hotter conditions can produce larger versions of some varieties. Indeed, it is almost as if North America is a very large island, with large bodies of water surrounding it, even if the northern extent is frozen, it still benefits from large quantities of moisture.

We do not have space in this newsletter to look at the individual climates which the key hosta growers experience, but we have noticed that many hosta varieties grow to different dimensions in the UK, compared to their American counterparts.

The fact that hostas flourish in more extreme climates is exciting when you consider how little of the vast continent of Asia has been explored for plant life. We like to believe that there are still many more hosta species yet to be discovered and enjoyed. On that optimistic note, let's move on and see what effect the weather has on hosta hardiness.

Conditions	Effects over winter	Tips
Too wet	Hostas are not aquatic plants so will rot if the crowns sit in water. Hostas will also 'damp off' more quickly if they get very cold when too wet.	Let potted hostas drain well prior to the onset of frosts. Lean pots on their side in the lee of a fence or wall so they do not become waterlogged.
Too dry	Hosta roots will wither and die if they dry out completely and lower temperatures will damage dry roots very quickly.	Hostas can dry out over winter so do check them occasionally and water when the weather is less cold
Too cold	So far we haven't noticed any real problems with cold weather, especially if the plants are healthy prior to going dormant. The only problems we have had is when cold is combined with too much dry or wet.	Do what you can to keep your hostas healthy as they enter dormancy. If you are a collector of miniature varieties, popping them into a cold frame over winter will help guard against potential root damage.

The last two UK winters saw extended periods of cold weather with temperatures on or below zero for weeks at a time. Last winter the temperature in East Anglia sat below freezing for quite a long time, hitting -15°C to -18°C occasionally in frost pockets. When the cold spell eventually broke, the hostas emerged just as glorious as ever - indeed we believe the harsher the winter dormancy, the better the leaf colour in the following season.

To sum up, we believe hostas are among the hardiest of garden plants and that if they experience a good hard winter, they will reward the garden with a fantastic show the following season.

If you would like more advice then read our **October 2007 newsletter**.

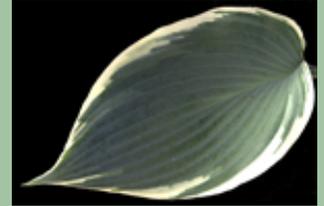
Did you know?

If you see the letters 'fuyu' in a hosta name, it means winter in Japanese. 'Haru' means spring, 'natsu' means summer and 'aki' means autumn...

Next month: We return to the subject of hosta species...



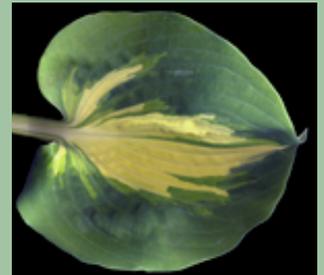
H. 'Rainforest Sunrise'



H. 'El Nino'



H. 'Sunshine Glory'



H. 'Thunderbolt'

Stuck for gift ideas this festive season?

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Find out more

The advice and opinions contained within this monthly newsletter have been formed over more than 30 years of experience with the Hosta genus. We are constantly learning and refining that knowledge and would welcome any suggestions that readers of this newsletter would like to make so please [contact us](#).

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