



Hostas in hanging baskets

This month we focus on this way of displaying and enjoying your hostas.

We share a few hints and tips and suggestions of cultivars that are great to use in hanging baskets...



Types of hanging basket

What you use is largely determined by how often you need to water your hanging baskets. The photo above shows the little plastic baskets I have used throughout 2018 and 2019 at flower shows.

The baskets come with a mesh insert and bung to enable a small reservoir of water to be stored at the base, which could be very useful if you plan to be away from your garden for a while and watering may be a problem. I don't do this as I prefer the baskets to drain and I only need to water once a week, a good soaking and then they can be left providing they are not in full sun or a windy spot.

I have also used coir lined metal framed baskets, which tend to be larger. These are very attractive and can accommodate more plant material. Watering is a bit easier as you can stand the basket in a container and allow the water to thoroughly soak the basket and the coir lining will help direct the water into the roots of the plants. However, the same process works in reverse once the basket is hanging, with the moisture wicked away by the coir. Therefore, it is a good idea to pop a plastic lining into the base of the basket to create a shallow reservoir to avoid the basket completely drying out. When I used these baskets I found they dried out much faster and could damage the root system quite quickly if not attended to.



A 'how to' video for hostas in hanging baskets

This video was produced for the Virtual Flower Show held during April.



A spring evening stroll round the nursery

This video was also created for the Virtual Flower Show so I thought I would share it with you here too.



Hostas don't need a huge amount of water but if their roots dry out too much it can be very difficult to re-hydrate them.

Soil

Hostas are not particularly fussy about soil conditions but they will do better in less rich mixes. Therefore, if all you have is general multipurpose compost then mix in a little garden soil and grit to help bring down the nutrient level. An important point to remember is that when soil dries out the nitrate level can soar, which is can damage hostas.

We like the [Dalefoot](#) potting medium for hostas in hanging baskets. We top dress with some fine composted bark to help keep moisture in. You can use water-retentive crystals to help do this too but bear in mind they are very effective and in a hot, wet summer could cause the roots to damp off and rot. This is the main reason I prefer to allow my baskets to drain freely.

Creating a nursery for your plants

As you might guess, using hanging baskets is a great way to show off miniature varieties that would otherwise be rather lost in most garden situations. Hosta theatres are also a good display method but many varieties would start to stretch towards the light unless swapped round regularly.

I have found hanging baskets useful to help bring plants forward for shows in the spring as they offer 360 degrees of light at a time when light levels are a little unpredictable. The plants emerge more evenly and you can avoid the risk of frost if you throw a fleece over the basket frame.

In the same way you can encourage varieties that will eventually become too large for the hanging baskets to develop at a faster rate. Once a plant becomes too big you can simply divide it and pop a piece back into the basket and then plant the rest elsewhere.

Bonsai

Many hostas can cope with being a little restricted in their containers although some varieties don't like it and can become a little stressed. A good indicator of stress is premature flowering, or flowers being produced instead of leaves. Their defence is usually to bonsai if they become too pot bound.

See opposite for more information.

Division

Obviously, if your hanging basket has become too crowded you will need to remove some of the material. We always recommend using water as the best tool for doing this. Remove the plants from the basket and either use a bucket of water to soak the root

Virtual RHS Malvern Spring Festival 2020

For the very first time a 'virtual' version of RHS Malvern, will be launched on www.rhsmalvern.co.uk on what would have been the opening day of the festival – Thursday 7 May.

Virtual show gardens are being created using 3D renders and beautiful 3D animations to produce an immersive experience, bringing the garden designs to life. Show garden designer Villaggio Verde has created 'The Taverna Cove' by teaming up with Concepts Conveyed to literally build a virtual garden from scratch - you can follow [@MalvernShows](#) Facebook page.

The Malvern team have invited all their contributors to participate, so why not join them at rhsmalvern.co.uk on launch day 7 May.



Bonsai hostas

There are some varieties that will bonsai much more successfully than others, one of which is [H. 'Gold Drop'](#) and its progeny. I created a newsletter devoted to this

ball, or jet water from a hose into the root ball. The water will help remove the soil more easily and help you untangle the roots. Using water helps make the root ball more pliable.

Benefits of baskets

This was going to be a 'pros and cons' section but the only real problem with growing hostas in hanging baskets is getting the watering right and hopefully we have given you enough hints for achieving this.

The positives are many:

- Elevating your plants is a great way to see them in a different way. Choose a variety with coloured stems so you can really get the impact of the colour rather than looking down into the plant and missing all that detail.
- Some really tiny miniatures are much easier to appreciate at eye level than in a pot on the ground, where they might get lost among other planting.
- Bringing plants up to eye level in shady, neglected areas such as the backs of sheds and dark alleyways can brighten up a blank area.
- Vertical gardening adds a new dimension, especially where space is at a premium.
- Elevating your plants helps protect them against slug and snail damage, especially if you use a metal frame or hanger. They really do not like climbing over metallic surfaces.

Using hanging baskets presents an opportunity for you to create something quite different than the usual fare. Why not consider planting other genus with your hosta, such as ivies, heuchera or tiny bulbs, you could create a miniature woodland in a basket?

Have fun in your gardens and stay safe.

Team Mickfield Hostas

lovely cultivar back in [January 2015](#). The photo above shows a mature [H. 'Amy Elizabeth'](#) with a root restricted version in front. Even the flower scapes were shorter in height.

Essentially the success of growing hostas in containers relies upon the root system and the room it will ultimately require. You can make a calculated guess based upon the height and spread of the plant mound.

Hosta are like trees, the canopy largely mirrors the spread of the root system.



Multiple planting

If you have larger baskets why not plant them up with different varieties. The photo above (from the video) shows two types planted together and there are endless combinations you can choose. It's up to you to let your own creativity run wild.