

## Sun-tolerant Hostas and Ferns

### Hostas

Do you long for the texture and woody feel of ferns but have little shade to offer them? Do you love the lush leaves and bold color a grouping of hostas give you in a border, but again, have little shade to protect them? Don't fret. You may be able to experience some of these great plants in your garden.

Most hostas will tolerate and even thrive in a site with morning sun. It is the hot afternoon sun that can burn their leaves. The natural habitat of hostas, originally from Eastern Asia, is at the edge of woods, not in deep shade. They grow in openings in the forest canopy and along sunny banks and open grasslands where they get plenty of sun early in spring, but are shaded later in the summer season by taller growth around them.



Hostas expire a lot of water via their leaves, so it is an important factor to have a constant supply of soil moisture at their roots. Hostas prefer organic, well-drained soil and will perform well for you if you meet these needs. Mulching will help with water retention.

Variegated varieties have less chlorophyll and will do better with a bit more sunshine. The dark green and blue-leaved plants need more shade to remain healthy and keep their color. Some hostas are quite fragrant. These varieties require more sun to bloom well and will tolerate a fair amount of afternoon sun. The thicker the leaf, the better chances of it not burning in the hot sun.

Try planting spring bulbs as companion plants with your Hostas. Their foliage can be hidden after blooming by the larger hosta leaves.

Some Hosta varieties for you to try include:

**Blues:** 'Blue Angel', 'Elegans', 'Halcyon', 'Krossa Regal'

**Variegated:** 'Francee', 'So Sweet', 'Sugar and Cream', 'Allan P. McConnell', 'Albo-marginata' 'Guacamole', 'Fragrant Bouquet'

**Yellows:** 'August Moon', 'Sun Power'

**Greens:** 'Honeybells', 'Invincible', 'Pearl Lake', 'Royal Standard', 'Aphrodite' 'Sum and Substance'

## Ferns

Feathery ferns are a favorite addition to many shade gardens and add a "delicate wispieness" no other plant can match. Often we see them growing naturally under trees, combined with spring-blooming bulbs, impatiens and other moisture-loving plants. Most ferns require shade and high humidity to survive summer heat, but there are several that grow well in sun and fairly dry soil, and many more that will withstand full sun if moisture is provided to the roots.



Ferns start growth very early in the spring, and retain their delicate leafy foliage until frost freezes them back in the fall.

They are mostly free from disease or insect pests, and thus are easy to grow in gardens or border plantings around the home.

Woodland ferns grow best in a soil which has high humus content; almost pure leaf mold is ideal. The average garden soil may be made suitable for ferns by adding liberal quantities of peat moss or compost. It is advisable to give your ferns a good start with careful attention to watering the first couple of seasons. After that, they require no more watering than most other garden plantings. Some are actually reasonably drought tolerant once established.

Some Fern varieties to try are:

*Thelypteris kunthii* – Southern Shield Fern. It is happiest in loose, rich soil and, while it appreciates moisture at its roots, it will also tolerate a great deal of drought.

*Dryopteris ludoviciana* – Florida Shield Fern. It enjoys the same conditions as Southern Shield Fern but is a bit more cold-hardy and can be evergreen in sheltered areas during mild winters.

*Asplenium scolopendrium* – Hart's-tongue Fern. Hart's-tongue fern is unique among ferns for its undivided, strap-like fronds up to 2' tall. These like alkaline soil with good drainage and can be grown in part sun. There are some decorative cultivars, among them: 'Cristatum', 'Laceratum Kaye' and 'Undulatum'.

*Athyrium filix-femina* – Lady Fern. On moist sites, lady ferns will tolerate more sun. In spring remove old fronds and divide congested groups. Because of their vigor, they are good for massing as groundcovers. Some showier cultivars include: 'Cristatum', 'Frizelliae', 'Victoriae' and 'Lady in Red'.

*Cheilanthes* – Lip Fern: This group of small ferns (6"–12" tall) is unusual, as they prefer dry habitats and full to part sun. A rock or wall garden in partial sun, with loose, gritty soil and a cool area for roots to run among rocks is ideal. Try 'Lanosa' and 'Argentea'.

*Dennstaedtia punctiloba* – Hay-Scented Fern. This species is a bright green, fast-growing groundcover up to 18" tall, turning soft yellow in autumn. It will grow among rocks and in poor, sandy soil, including fairly dry shade. Plants in full sun may go dormant if the soil is too dry.

*Dryopteris filix-mas* – Male Fern. This is a stately native fern and one of the easiest to grow, forming large clumps 2-3' tall. This species will tolerate sun if the soil is moist. Some cultivars of *Dryopteris filix-mas* include: 'Barnesii', 'Crispatissima', 'Grandiceps' and 'Linearis Polydactyla'.

*Osmunda regalis* – Royal Fern. Royal ferns require consistently moist soil in sun or shade conditions but tolerate more alkaline soils than *O. cinnamomea*. This is a slightly smaller plant than cinnamon fern.

## Sources

[Growing Hostas](#), Ohio State University Extension website

[Missouri Botanical Garden](#)

[Sun Tolerant Hostas](#), Perfect Perennials website

Hosta Sun or Shade?, <http://www.hostas.com/hostas/guide/hosta-sunorshade.html>

[Virginia Cooperative Extension Toronto Botanical Garden](#)