

# GROWERTALKS

## Culture Notes

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### A Game-changer for Coastal Gardeners in the Southeast

*Bernard Chodyla*



In the hot, humid climate of the Southeastern United States, growing traditional shade-loving hostas has long been a challenge. Yet the SunHosta, bred specifically for full sun, offers a remarkable solution. Developed in Florida, this medium-sized, variegated hosta flourishes in sunlight and in tropical, humid conditions, making it a game-changer for southern gardens.

Unlike most hostas, SunHosta thrives in full sun, especially when exposed to four to six hours of direct sunlight daily. Its attractive thick foliage allows for vivid white variegation, which shines brightest in sunny conditions.

SunHosta is designed to handle Florida's summer heat without burning. The plant grows up to 2-ft. tall and spreads 2- to 3-ft. wide, making it suitable for borders, container gardens and foundation plantings in sunny spaces where other hostas will fail.

Because SunHosta has very low cold requirements, it remains vegetative year-round in frost-free regions of South Florida. In areas with mild freezes, it will undergo dormancy, but reliably re-emerges in early spring, returning larger and more vigorous than before.

SunHosta is also very drought tolerant. With its strong root system and thick leaves, SunHosta withstands dry spells exceptionally well. It thrives in sandy coastal areas, but will benefit from the addition of organic matter to improve nutrient retention.

The plant also attracts hummingbirds and pollinators with its fragrant, white trumpet-shaped blooms, which typically appear in late spring and early summer.

#### **Propagation from tissue culture**

Stick in plug trays filled with well-drained growing media under mist. It's best to keep the foliage constantly moist for at least one week after stick. Begin reducing mist when the roots start elongating and start feeding with 150 ppm N from well-balanced fertilizer twice per week. The liners should be ready for transplanting within five to six weeks.

Maintain minimum 72F (22C) during rooting and place under lights for day extension.

### **Finishing SunHosta**

For growers in USDA Zones 10a and 10b, SunHosta can be finished year-round and is ready to flower in spring if planted in the fall. The gallon SunHosta will finish in around 12 weeks and quart size in eight weeks from rooted liner. Plants will grow slower in the winter, but remain fully vegetative without turning brown like other hostas. SunHosta planted in South Florida in the fall will flower in April.

In other regions, for best results SunHosta should be planted from liners in summer/fall for spring sales. Plants will establish a root system in the fall and emerge in April and bloom in July.

For the best results, transplant liners into peat-based, well-drained soil, maintain pH 5.8 to 6.5, and feed frequently with 200 ppm from well-balanced fertilizer. SunHosta responds well to increased feed while it emerges from winter dormancy. It's best to keep plants moist and frequently fertilized to maintain the glossy and healthy appearance of the variegated foliage. Avoid overly wet conditions during winter dormancy for best root development.

Slugs and snails, as well as leaf beetles and cutworms are the most common pests on hostas. Since SunHosta is produced in tissue culture, the starting material is virus and disease free, so maintaining clean and weed-free growing conditions will prevent most of the potential disease issues. Once established in the garden, SunHosta is low maintenance and rarely troubled by pests or disease.

SunHosta is available from tissue culture and sold as rooted liners only through all major plant brokers in the U.S.

### **Expanding garden possibilities**

Due to the great drought and heat tolerance, SunHosta has excellent sell-through and shelf life during the summer months at garden centers in the Southeast. It's one of the most sought-after plants by snowbirds vacationing in Florida.

With its resilience, beauty and adaptability, SunHosta is proving to be more than just a novelty—it's a reliable landscape performer. For those in the Southeast coastal regions and Florida who thought hostas were out of reach, this variety offers a fresh start. **GT**

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