



MICKFIELD HOSTAS



Dear Subscriber

It seems like a good point, with the shortest day fast approaching, that we consider the importance of light levels in the development of your Hosta.

Light levels vary widely across a typical year and the seasons come and go according to the duration of light, which is why Hosta will emerge around April and go dormant around October, every year. Like most perennials, Hosta also flower at certain times, depending upon the variety, usually June through to August. Every year anomalies occur, which can impact the expected progress of your plant, such as the weather and the environment the plant is growing in. However, light levels are one of the most important controls over how your plant grows.

There are three main aspects to light, which affect plant development:

Quality of light: how many wavelengths of light a plant is exposed to, from red through to blue. Leaves 'look' green to us as this is the wavelength most often reflected and so the green wavelength is the least useful to a plant.

Different wavelengths encourage different aspects of plant growth and so the full spectrum is the most useful. We are often asked if Hosta will grow indoors and, although they can for a limited time, their lack of exposure to the full spectrum of sunlight will not allow optimum development.

Hosta will grow in very deep shade as long as they can experience daylight in some form. They tend to emerge slightly later but look good well into the autumn, due to the reduced levels of light.

Quantity of light: the intensity of full spectrum light experienced, which depends largely on the time of year and weather patterns. This is critical for photosynthesis, which is triggered by exposure to sunlight. A bright year will allow a plant to create plentiful sugars for more rapid development.

Length of day/night: the duration of daylight as determined by the time of the year – this is usually called the photo-period and determines the time of year a plant will flower. The length of night is as important in this process as the day,



This month we thought it worth reminding you of the [newsletter archive](#) on our website, which includes heaps of information on all aspects of *Hosta*, categorised according to subject matter.



Hosta 'Pineapple Upside-down Cake'
The leaf colour is most intense in summer and stays that way into autumn, at which point the leaf centres turn white:



which is why flowering can be artificially controlled by blocking out light, rather than introducing it. Fragrant varieties of Hosta tend to flower in the evening as light levels fall and benefit from the additional warmth provided by buildings, walls or fences, which have absorbed heat during the day and radiate it out gradually into the night.

The reality that we are 'seeing' light as wavelengths is fascinating. Blue-leaved hosta only 'look' blue due to the refractive quality of a glaucous bloom, which forms over the surface of the leaves. Sunlight has the habit of destroying that bloom, so a general rule of thumb is to plant blue varieties in more shade to protect the bloom.

We are often asked which varieties will cope with more sun. The answer is that most will, given adequate moisture to prevent dehydration, however, their colour is often compromised. Cultivars with white areas to the leaves will often suffer scorching in full sun, but not all. Some varieties look brighter in full sun. Our advice is always to try out a position to see if it works – if the plant appears to be suffering in too much light, simply move it.

One of the best full sun varieties is [H. 'Sum and Substance'](#) which turns gold in full sun but does need a good source of moisture to counteract the rate of transpiration the huge leaves encourage. It is worth spending some time understanding how light levels work in your garden to get the most out of your Hosta.

Those among us who work with the seasons, have grown to anticipate the arrival of the 21st December, the shortest day of the year, with just as much joy as Christmas. As the days gradually lengthen from that date, we look forward to the coming season, and all it will bring.

On that note, we hope you all have a peaceful Christmas and have the time to relax those hard working gardening muscles in preparation for the year ahead.

Team Mickfield

This is the same parent plant as featured in the first photo but the autumnal albescence was hastened as a result of being exposed to full sun for a week at Hyde Hall.

Viridescence, lutescence and albescence

These are all terms which apply to seasonal colour variations in foliage and Hosta are no exception.

As light levels change during the season leaves can turn greener, brighter or whiter, either as whole or in part. This can turn a variegated cultivar into a plain-leaved version, or variegation can develop as the season progresses. Some varieties just get better the older the leaves get and some produce more vibrant leaves after in the season to create a layered effect, over older, duller leaves.

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