

HYDRANGEA

Hydrangea spp.

The word Hydrangea begins with the Greek word for water, hydra. This is a clue to help us remember that Hydrangeas require plenty of water, particularly as they are getting established. Their root systems are quite shallow and dry out quickly. **Regular and deep watering is important, as is well-draining soil. They will not tolerate wet feet.** A two inch layer of mulch around the base of the plants will help insulate the plants in winter and keep the soil from drying out too quickly in summer. As with any mulch, do not mound it up against the stems of the plant.

For optimal flowering, Hydrangeas require four hours of sun each day, ideally in the morning. Hot afternoon sun can cause *H. macrophylla* varieties to wilt. Panicle Hydrangeas are the most sun tolerant, thriving in anything from full sun to part shade conditions. *H. quercifolia* and *H. petiolaris* are the most shade tolerant.

Hydrangeas love the naturally occurring acidic (pH below 7) nature of our New England soil. The pH of our soil allows aluminum to be readily available to the roots and the more aluminum that is absorbed, the more intensely blue the flowers will be. For those whose taste runs more to the pink tones, plant breeders have introduced a number of varieties that stay true to color.

HYDRANGEA SPECIES

Hydrangea macrophylla

- Perhaps the most widely grown
- Macrophylla means “big leaf”
- Mophead flower form is round and ball shaped. Well known varieties include ‘Endless Summer’, ‘Bloomstruck’, ‘Nantucket Blue’, ‘Summer Crush’ and the ‘Let’s Dance’ series
- Lacecap flower form has slightly domed flower heads with many small florets in the center and larger florets around the edge. Lacecap varieties include ‘Twist and Shout’, ‘Wedding Gown’



Hydrangea paniculata

- Most sun tolerant of all Hydrangeas
- Reliable bloomers with large, cone-shaped flowers, colors subtly change over time
- Full size versions grow 6 to 8 ft.
- Smaller versions grow 3-5 ft.
- Available in tree form. Adds stature, structure and scale to the garden



Hydrangea arborescens

- Known as smooth Hydrangea
- Most shade tolerant of all Hydrangeas
- Mophead flower form includes ‘Annabelle’ and ‘Incrediball’



Hydrangea serrata

- Known as mountain Hydrangea
- Lacecap flower form attracts pollinators
- Varieties include ‘Bluebird’ and the ‘Tuff Stuff’ series



Hydrangea quercifolia

- Known as oakleaf Hydrangea as leaves resemble oak leaves
- Dark green leaves turn mahogany red in fall
- Exfoliating bark adds winter interest
- Cone shaped flower form
- Varieties include ‘Alice’, ‘Snow Queen’, ‘Gatsby Gal’, ‘Sikes Dwarf’



Hydrangea petiolaris

- Known as climbing Hydrangea
- Clings to trees, fencing or other structures by aerial rootlets along its stem
- Horizontal branching habit, heart shaped foliage
- Slow to establish: first year it sleeps, second year it creeps, then it leaps



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FERTILIZING

Planted in good soil, rich in organic matter, and in the proper light conditions, Hydrangeas require little fertilizer. A slow release organic fertilizer with a high percentage of phosphorus (the middle number in the NPK ratio) can be applied in spring. Phosphorus is the element that encourages bloom. A fertilizer with a high percentage of nitrogen (the first number in the NPK ratio) will encourage leaf growth at the expense of flower production. Do not apply fertilizer in the fall as this will promote tender new growth which will not have time to harden off before winter.

PRUNING

When and how to prune Hydrangeas are frequently asked questions. **The short answer is that Hydrangeas require very little pruning.** Too frequent, improperly timed or vigorous pruning can remove flower buds. **Before pruning, it is important to understand when Hydrangeas form their flower buds.**

Some types set their flower buds on the new season's growth (in the spring). This is referred to as blooming on new wood. To reduce the height of the plant, prune in late winter or very early spring while the plant is still dormant.

Some types form flower buds at the end of the current year's blooming season. The buds go dormant as winter approaches and open the following summer. This is referred to as blooming on old wood. If pruned in spring, the result will be a lack of flowers.

Reblooming Hydrangeas have been introduced to the market which bloom on both old wood and new wood. This allows for more reliable flowering but pruning runs the risk of removing flower buds from old and/or new wood.

Hydrangeas can be very late to leaf out. Don't assume a stalk is dead unless it is still leafless in late May.

Hydrangea Type	Pruning Time
Macrophylla ('Nantucket Blue', 'Endless Summer', etc.)	Blooms on old wood. Prune with caution in late summer before flower buds form for next year.
Paniculata ('Quick Fire', 'Bobo', 'Strawberry Sundae', etc.)	Blooms on new wood. Prune in late winter/early spring (no later than April 15) to reduce height
Arborescens ('Annabelle', 'Incrediball', etc.)	Blooms on new wood. New science suggests late winter/early spring pruning is not advantageous.
Serrata ('Tuff Stuff', 'Bluebird', etc.)	Blooms on old wood. Requires very little pruning. Prune only to remove dead stalks.
Quercifolia ('Alice', 'Snow Queen', 'Gatsby Gal', etc.)	Takes a number of years to mature. Blooms on old wood. Prune only if absolutely necessary.
Petiolaris (Climbing Hydrangea)	Takes a number of years to mature. Blooms on old wood. Prune only if absolutely necessary.

Remember, Hydrangeas generally require very little pruning. When purchasing a new Hydrangea, consider the variety's mature size so that pruning can be kept to a minimum.

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