
HYDRANGEA CULTURE & CARE

LOCATION Locate your hydrangea where it will receive morning sun and shelter from hot afternoon sun. Avoid dry windy sites, as their large, soft leaves lose water quickly, especially on hot, windy days, causing the foliage to wilt. Hydrangea will not perform well in heavy shade, such as under an oak tree. The blooms will be sparse and will not develop fully. Be sure to place the hydrangea in an area where it can get plenty of moisture!

WATER / FERTILIZER **Hydrangeas like water** (The root word “hydra” is actually the Greek word for water). The leaves will begin to droop quickly if the soil is too dry. Supplemental moisture is especially important the first year or two, and is a good idea during the hot summer months. Hydrangeas grow best if they are fertilized regularly. We recommend applying a slow release, balanced fertilizer once or twice a year. Both applications should be in the summer.

VARIABLE FLOWER COLOR Hydrangea macrophylla is the litmus test plant of the garden. They generally prefer a slightly acidic soil, more so if you want blue blooms. The color change from blues to reds is actually caused by the amount of *available aluminum* in the soil. Since aluminum availability strongly depends on soil pH, it is generally assumed that pH alone is the determining factor of flower color. Generally, the aluminum is already in the soil and will become available once the soil pH is low enough to unlock it. A pH between 5.0-5.5 (6.0 *maybe*) will allow enough aluminum to turn flowers blue, the lower the pH the bluer the color. A pH of around 6.8 (no higher usually, as the plant won't like it) is perfect if you want nice pink-red blooms. Plant genetics also plays a big role in just how far you can stretch those color changes, as the different varieties tend to lean one way or another on the color spectrum. The lesson here is not to buy 'Red Star' or something similar if you want a vibrant blue – you just can't stretch the color that far and will usually end up with more of a purple (can be nice) or sickly mauve color (not so nice). To supplement the fertilizer and increase the acidity of your soil you can use egg shells, coffee grounds, or ground up orange or grapefruit peels. Rhody/Azalea fertilizers tend to make the soil more acidic also. Most methods of lowering soil pH take some time, but there is one quick (yet potentially hazardous) method that you can use. Aluminum sulfate will change bloom colors rapidly, but can severely burn or kill a plant if applied too heavily. We are talking maybe a cup for a big plant, then see what happens before adding more. Again, we need to stress that heavy applications can be toxic and cause major harm to the plant.

STRESS / FUNGUS / INSECTS Hydrangeas will usually be the first plant to start wilting when it gets dry. Drooping, yellowing, or malformed/shriveled leaves are often signs that the plant is just not getting the level of water it desires. If you detect black spotting or brown/gray coloration in the leaves, you may be experiencing a fungus problem. This can come from poor air circulation around the plant or sometimes uneven watering. Try thinning the plant a bit if it is old and overgrown or trim back vegetation around the plant to try and encourage better air circulation. Application of a fungicide may be necessary to combat this problem if it is chronic. If you find evidence of leaves being eaten, you should try and determine what type of critter is responsible so that you can treat accordingly. Slugs and caterpillars are two of the worst offenders, but other insects can also cause problems at times. Remember that not all leaf damage is caused by insects; fungus or mechanical damage is often misinterpreted as the work of a bug. If you are not sure how to treat your problem, please ask a sales associate.

HYDRANGEA SPECIES & VARIETIES

Hydrangea is a large genus with over 80 species of deciduous and evergreen shrubs and climbers, though it is generally the deciduous shrubs that are common in our gardens. Hydrangeas are among the easiest ornamentals to grow, thriving in a variety of climates and conditions from north to south and coast to coast. They want a humus-rich soil, ample moisture and relief from midday sun. Add an annual pruning specific to the species and the needs of these garden favorites are fairly well met.

Hydrangea anomala ssp. petiolaris is the one of the few vines in the genus Hydrangea. This variety is a slow starter until its roots are firmly established - usually two to three years after planting – but will take off rapidly once it gets settled in. In vigor and elegance it is unsurpassed, reaching up to 60 ft. by means of self-clinging, aerial rootlets and bearing an abundance of rich green, heart-shaped leaves. The white flower is a flat, lacy cluster of both fertile and sterile blossoms borne on stiff, erect stems in mid-June and into July. General pruning, although not usually necessary, is best done immediately after blossoms fade. This plant will generally take a few years to really start climbing.

Hydrangea seemanii really doesn't fit in anywhere but here. It is an evergreen climbing form that is relatively new to gardeners in this area. Generally hardy in our zone, it may reach up to 20'-30', although it will probably stay smaller depending on the circumstance. Flowers are similar to *anomala ssp. petiolaris*.

Schizophragma hydrangeoides is also lumped into this "Climbing Hydrangea" group. Actually, many people really can't tell much of a difference between this and *anomala ssp. petiolaris* unless they get right up to them. The main differences are that the leaves aren't as glossy (some forms taking on interesting silvery undertones), the plant will be about half the size (maybe 30'), and this plant won't develop the massive structural frame common to the true climbing Hydrangea. It is pretty much a smaller, more delicate looking form of *anomala ssp. petiolaris*. The variety '**Roseum**' has pink-rose bracts.

Hydrangea arborescens This fast growing, elegant show-off usually forms a rounded spreading shrub from 4 to 6 feet tall with a spread of 5 to 8 feet. Flat-topped clusters, 4 to 6 inches across, of small greenish white flowers, larger sterile flowers may be present along edges of cluster, appear in June. Sometimes the plant will flower a second time early in the fall. The stem has a peculiar tendency to peel off in several successive layers of thin, different-colored bark, hence the common name of "sevenbark." This plant often dies back during the winter, and if it's not pruned in early spring, the flower clusters become small. '**Annabelle**' is the commonly preferred variety, with monstrous flowers sometimes reaching up to 1 ft across!

Hydrangea macrophylla has long been admired for its voluptuous, pink-to-red or blue-to-purple flower clusters. *H. macrophylla* has a rounded habit to about 5-6 ft. with bold, serrated, light-green leaves to 8 inches in length, which in some varieties are creamy-margined. The six to ten inch flower clusters consist of both sterile (showy) and fertile (nearly inconspicuous) blossoms. There are two distinct flower types of *H. macrophylla*, the best known being those with globe shaped heads of primarily sterile flowers. These are the original "hortensias" of our grandmothers' gardens also known as **mopheads**. The other is the **lacecap** type, having an inner cluster of fertile flowers surrounded by conspicuous sterile blossoms, giving a lacy appearance. Lacecaps also tend to develop more color variation between the different parts of the flower, adding some nice contrasts.

Pruning can be accomplished at two different times. Late summer is more desirable, since most* hortensia types flower only from the end buds of upright or lateral shoots produced during late summer and fall of the previous season. Prune as soon as the flowers have faded and strong shoots are developing from the lower parts of the stems and crown. Stems that have flowered should be cut back by 1/3 to just above a strong developing bud. Remove at the base some of the weaker new shoots, and thin out some of the older woodier growth. Always try to keep several stems of old productive wood, with a sufficient number of stout new stems that will flower the following season. Early spring pruning (March), although acceptable, will often result in the sacrificing of bloom for that growing season. Pruning this species too late in the fall (after September) is harmful and will result in the new growth, both vegetative and reproductive, not developing to proper maturity.

*Some varieties will bloom on new growth. While it is usually best to treat them just like the others, you can usually prune these much harder and earlier and still get flowers (albeit a little smaller).

Hydrangea paniculata, native to China and Japan, is the giant of the genus. A mature specimen, well kept and in the right place is a sight to behold. From July to September this graceful beauty is covered with pyramidal, opulent clusters of snowy white, then pink-tinged to dusty-purple and finally, warm-wheat flower heads. With an upright habit becoming gracefully vase shaped and arching with age, it will reach 25 ft. with a spread of about 15 ft. Most often it is grown as a large shrub or a small tree to 12 ft.

Pruning involves the removal of dead flowers, if unattractive, and an annual corrective pruning of vigorous shoots. Thin and/or cut back the previous season's growth in late winter or early spring, since flower clusters occur on newly developing branches. Without regular pruning, this hydrangea can rapidly become quite overgrown and out of scale in the landscape. It can, however, be developed into a single or multi-stemmed tree form.

Hydrangea quercifolia is known as Oakleaf hydrangea due to its deep green oak-like leaves which mature to glorious oranges and reds in the fall. This species brightens the garden with erect, showy clusters of white blossoms, appearing in mid-July. With its wonderful foliage and ornamental peeling bark, this lush hydrangea produces a woody feel if left unpruned. When selectively thinned, the plant makes a distinctive specimen or container plant. Prune back in early spring to remove dead wood. Cut back to below the point of injury and remove old wood to the base. This species tends to be tougher than the rest of its family, and will take much more heat, drought, and general abuse than most others.

Hydrangea serrata is closely related to *H. macrophylla* (some call it a subspecies) but is generally smaller and more graceful in appearance. You will not find the huge "macrophylla mopheads" here, but what you will find are charming smaller shrubs with a lot of personality in both flower and foliage. This form tends to be very free-flowering, with graceful slender stems and narrower more delicate foliage, yet is also considered to tougher and hardier than *H. macrophylla*. The flowers also tend to be smaller, usually in more of a lacecap form.