

# Growing Hydrangeas

Hydrangeas are some of our all-time favorite shrubs for partly shaded areas. They are beautiful in the garden, gorgeous as cut flowers, and do well planted in the ground or in large containers. All are deciduous winter-hardy plants. In coastal areas, hydrangeas may tolerate some afternoon sun, but inland, make sure they are planted where they receive only morning sun or filtered sun. Hydrangeas are never drought-resistant, so be prepared to water frequently (even daily) in warm weather. And deer love hydrangeas too, so don't plant them where deer are able to feast on the flowers.

## Types of Hydrangeas

### Bigleaf Hydrangea – *Hydrangea macrophylla*



- Mophead or lacecap hydrangeas, sometimes called French hydrangeas.
- The color can be white, pink, blue, mauve or nearly red. Most can change their flower color depending on soil chemistry.
- Most bloom on old wood, but many new varieties are **re-blooming**, setting new buds throughout the season.
- Popular varieties include 'Blue Enchantress' (shown) 'Sister Theresa', 'Pink Elf', 'Endless Summer' Series, & 'Seaside Serenade' Series.

### Panicle or Peegee Hydrangea – *Hydrangea paniculata*

- Football-shaped (and sized!) flowers.
- The flowers start out lime-green or white, then take on pink to red tones. Can't be turned blue.
- Bloom on new wood.
- More sun-tolerant than other varieties. May take full sun in coastal areas.
- Notable varieties include 'Limelight' (shown), 'Little Lime', & 'Tardiva'.



### Smooth Hydrangea – *Hydrangea arborescens*

- Huge, round flower heads.
- Flowers begin lime-green, mature to white, then age to jade green.
- Bloom on new wood.
- Notable varieties include 'Annabelle' & 'Incrediball'.

### Climbing Hydrangea – *Hydrangea petiolaris* (*H. anomala subspecies petiolaris*)

- White, lacecap-type flowers.
- Climb by clinging, aerial roots.
- Bloom on old wood.
- 'Miranda' has variegated foliage.



### Oakleaf Hydrangea – *Hydrangea quercifolia*



- White, pyramid shaped flowers often age to pink or green.
- Bloom on old wood.
- Beautiful fall foliage color.
- 'Pee-wee', 'Snow Queen', & 'Ruby Slippers' (fall foliage shown) are some notable varieties.

## Pruning Hydrangeas

Depending on the species, hydrangeas may bloom either on new wood or old wood.

If a hydrangea blooms on **new wood** it means that flower buds for the year are formed after the plant begins to leaf out in spring. They can be pruned in winter without negatively impacting the bloom. Though pruning is not strictly necessary, it encourages stronger stems, better blooming, and an overall more attractive shape.

If a hydrangea blooms on **old wood**, it means next year's buds are already present on the branches in fall and winter. Pruning too late (winter or spring) will cut off the flowers. For these types, prune in late summer to early fall (August-September), when the flowers fade. Pruning isn't necessary for the health of the plant, but may be desired to control the size and shape.

## Feeding

Hydrangeas appreciate regular feeding during the growing season. Apply **Master Nursery Rose & Flower Food** or **E.B. Stone Organics Rose & Flower Food** every other month from March-September.

## Color

All hydrangeas undergo some color change as their flowers age, but bigleaf hydrangeas (*H. macrophylla*) are the only commonly sold varieties that can change color based on soil chemistry. Most bigleaf varieties turn pink in alkaline (high pH) soil and blue in acid (low pH) soil with adequate aluminum content. Some varieties, such as 'Cityline Paris', 'Pia', and 'Seaside Serenade Cape Hatteras' retain their color regardless of soil pH. White-blooming varieties cannot be turned pink or blue.

In the Bay Area, our soil and water tend to be on the alkaline side, so hydrangeas will typically turn mauve to pink if untreated.

- **To intensify pink color:** Treat with **E.B. Stone Agricultural Lime** when buds are forming, spring or summer for once-bloomers, anytime for rebloomers.
- **For bolder blue color:** Apply **Aluminum Sulfate (Hydra Blue or True Blue)** monthly from October-January. Work into top inch of soil and water afterward. Some hydrangeas that are easy to keep blue are 'Nikko Blue', 'Kuhnert Blue', 'Endless Summer', and 'Newport'.

## Potential Problems

**No flowers** – The most common reason for lack of bloom is improper pruning. If your hydrangea is a variety that blooms on old wood, prune no later than August-September. Also, make sure your hydrangea has adequate light exposure, preferably at least 4 hours or more of morning sun or filtered sun. Fertilize regularly with a rose and flower food.

**Powdery mildew** – A common problem on many plants, powdery mildew is encouraged by too little sun and high humidity. If possible, move the plant so that it gets more sun and air circulation, and water in the morning so humidity is lower at night. Spray with **Copper Soap Fungicide** or **Neem** to prevent the problem and protect new foliage.

**Deer** – There's no getting around it: Hydrangeas are very attractive to deer. If you try to grow them where deer are able to get to them, they will break your heart.

**Leaf spots** - The problem is caused by a fungus that spreads in wet or humid conditions. To control leaf spot, avoid watering your hydrangeas from overhead, and remove and destroy diseased foliage.