



hydrangea

Hydrangeas provide outstanding garden interest with large, colorful flowers during July and August. Many varieties hold their maturing blossoms even into the fall. These garden favorites also add color and texture to the garden with their luxurious and sometimes rather bold foliage for much of the growing season. Hydrangeas may be enjoyed throughout the landscape, however, their beauty combines especially well with perennials and broadleaf evergreens. To insure success, be sure to consider the exposure and sunlight conditions of your individual garden areas, then make your selections based upon the growing needs of the specific varieties.

SOIL, MULCHING & WATERING

Hydrangeas will NOT grow in heavy soil or wet conditions, however, best growth occurs in moist, well-drained soils that have been greatly enriched with organic matter such as sphagnum peat or well-aged compost. Maintaining a 2-3" layer of organic mulch will help keep roots cool and moist during the summer heat. Additional irrigation may be necessary to reduce the chance of wilting, especially for plants situated in full sun conditions. New plants may frequently experience the "3 o'clock wilt" for the first few seasons, even if sufficiently hydrated. Be sure the rootball is receiving direct watering as overhead sprinklers may not penetrate the dense foliage.

PLANTING LOCATION - SUNLIGHT REQUIREMENTS

Hydrangeas are capable of growing in a wide variety of sunlight conditions. Please refer to the plant tag or the informational sign for the exact needs of each specific variety.

- ☀ = SUN - These varieties need at least 8 hours of direct sunlight.
- ☁ = PARTIAL SHADE - These plants need a minimum of 4 hours of direct sunlight and a maximum of 8 hours. Avoid hot afternoon sunlight.

As a rule, flower production and leaf variegation diminishes as sunlight levels decrease towards the 4 hour level. However, the foliage on many of the green BIGLEAF varieties continues to be quite beautiful, making them comparable to Hostas in this respect.

WILL FLOWERS BE BLUE OR PINK?

Certain varieties of BIGLEAF & MOUNTAIN Hydrangeas have the unique ability to change flower colors depending upon the acidity or alkalinity (expressed as pH) of the soil. Even subtle pH changes can cause plants to produce blue flowers one year, lilac colored the next and pink the year after.

What causes the change in flower color? Of the several substances believed to be involved, aluminum is the most important since the sepals of blue flowers contain ten times more aluminum than pink ones. Aluminum is only available when dissolved in acidic (lower pH) soils, which explains why flowers become bluer with increased acidity.

As a general rule, select blue/pink varieties will produce the following color results at these various pH levels:

pH between 5.5 and 6.0.....very blue
pH between 6.0 and 6.5.....blue
pH between 6.5 and 7.0.....pink
pH between 7.0 and 7.5.....very pink

Our Garden Stores have simple pH test kits available to determine the pH of your soil, as well as the various soil acidifying materials. Most soils in our area will naturally produce pink flowers. For pink flowers, the addition of small amounts of lime to the soil will increase the intensity of the pink color. Adding Aluminum Sulfate will lower the pH and increase the blue color. Depending on the existing pH, several applications made at 6 month intervals of Aluminum Sulfate may be required to achieve the desired color of blue.

The needs of red, pink and white flowering varieties are more easily met by simply providing a near neutral soil in the pH 6.5 to 7.5 range.

FERTILIZATION

Hydrangeas will perform best if given two applications of a general fertilizer such as **Espoma® Plant-tone** each year. If blue flowers are your goal, try **Espoma® Holly-tone** which has the added benefit of being an acidifier as well.

Your first application of fertilizer should be in early to mid-May, once growth has begun. A second application can be made 6 weeks later to help encourage lush, healthy foliage.

PRUNING HYDRANGEAS

With Hydrangeas, NO pruning is better than incorrect pruning. In fact, most varieties will grow and flower to some degree if they are never pruned at all, provided that they are properly cared for and planted in a protected location (if required).

Here are some simple pruning guidelines to follow...

1. Annabelle, Incrediball & Peegee Types

No pruning is really necessary except to remove spent flowers, broken or entangled branches and for general shaping. The best time to prune is in early spring before growth begins. Annabelle Hydrangeas may be treated like woody perennials and cut down to 6" each spring to encourage a compact growth habit.

2. Oakleaf Types

Delay spring pruning until growth has fully emerged. At this time, remove any winter damaged tips or stems that have not produced leaves. Once established (3+ years), Oakleaf Hydrangeas suffer little dieback if they are planted in a winter protected area, unless the previous winter has been extremely cold with sustained temperatures below -10°F. Heavy pruning should occur immediately after flowering, while removal of an occasional branch or two for shaping purposes can be done any time during the growing season.

3. Bigleaf & Mountain Types

Delay spring pruning until growth has fully emerged. At this time, remove any winter damaged tips or stems that have not produced leaves. Flower buds form near the stem tips during the previous year and may be accidentally removed if pruned back too far. Additional selective pruning may be done in late summer to remove just the spent blossoms if desired.



FLOWER RELIABILITY

The ability to produce flowers each year varies among the different Hydrangea types. Those varieties that flower on current year's growth will dependably flower each year, regardless of planting location. Varieties that bloom on old, or last year's growth are at the mercy of winter cold and spring frosts which can damage stems and flower buds.

Flowers produced on...

New growth (very reliable)

New growth (very reliable, once established)

Old growth (moderately reliable)

Old growth (most subject to winter cold/drying and spring frosts)

Hydrangea types

Annabelle, Incrediball & Peegee

Endless Summer™ series, Let's Dance® series, Tuff Stuff™ series plus other select varieties

Oakleaf

Bigleaf (mostly older varieties)

WINTER PROTECTION

The best protection comes from planting in the right winter protected location. For **BIGLEAF** types, additional protection may be given by loosely placing an insulating material such as pine straw or oak leaves around and over the stems. Wire mesh or burlap may be used as an outer enclosure to help contain the material if desired. Covering should take place in late November to mid-December, while removal should occur in April when the Forsythias begin to bloom. **OAKLEAF** varieties will benefit from this same protection for the first few seasons until well established.

FLOWER TYPES

Snowball (Mophead)

A term used to describe the familiar rounded blooms. The florets are sterile and forming large, colorful, globular heads

Lacecaps

A term to describe relatively flat and delicate flower heads which are made up of small fertile flowers in the center with a ring of large sterile florets around the outside

Cone-Shaped

These long, tapered flowers consist of large, sterile florets, often in combination with small fertile flowers

