

Hydrangea Care and Pruning

Types of Hydrangeas

When it comes to hydrangea shrubs, there are 5 species that are hardy for Midwest gardens.

Hydrangea arborescens - Smooth Hydrangea

This type of hydrangea has large, fluffy, globe-like flowers that are white, lime green or pink. They start flowering in June-July and can be grown in full sun or full shade locations.

Hydrangea paniculata - Panicle Hydrangea

Flowers appear in June-July and start out white or lime green in color then fade to pink and red as they age. The color does not change with soil acidity levels. The flowers can be cone-shaped (conical) or loose clusters (lacecap). This is the most sun tolerant hydrangea family but 'panicles' can also handle part sun conditions. They are the only hydrangea varieties grown in tree form.

Hydrangea macrophylla & Hydrangea serrata - Bigleaf Hydrangea & Mountain Hydrangea

These hydrangeas typically begin flowering in June and are separated into two main groups – 'mopheads' and 'lacecaps'. 'Mopheads' have fluffy, globe-like flowers with white, pink, purple or blue depending on soil acidity. 'Lacecaps' have the same color range but their flowers are in the form of large, lacy discs. These hydrangea varieties may wilt in sunnier locations so partial sun spots are recommended. Bigleaf and mountain hydrangeas are often used by florists and home gardeners for cuttings and floral arrangements.

Hydrangea quercifolia - Oakleaf Hydrangea

The leaves of this hydrangea family resemble oak leaves and turn maroon, red and orange colors in fall. The flower are cone shaped and age from white to pink or red as the season progresses. This type of hydrangea tolerates both sun and shade as well as slightly drier conditions.

H. arborescens

Annabelle

Incrediball Series

Invincibelle Series

H. macrophylla

Bloomstruck

Cityline Mars

Endless Summer

Glowing Embers

Light-O-Day

Pink Elf

Summer Crush

Wedding Gown

H. paniculata

Bobo

Firelight

Limelight

Little Lime

Little Quickfire

Pinky Winky

Quickfire

Strawberry Sundae

Vanilla Strawberry

White Diamonds

H. quercifolia

Gatsby Pink

Gatsby Star

Pee Wee

Ruby Slippers

H. serrata

Tiny Tuff Stuff

Tuff Stuff Red

Tuff Stuff Ah-Ha

Hydrangea Care

Light: Depending on the variety, there are hydrangeas that grow well in whatever light conditions you have - full shade, part sun and full sun. Most hydrangeas will grow well in 4-5 hrs of sun and prefer morning sun as opposed to the hot afternoon sun.

Water: Hydrangeas will drop leaves or reduce flowering during periods of drought. Gardeners should check the plant's water needs regularly during the summer; especially when young and newly planted.

Mulch: In an effort to preserve moisture to their shallow roots, hydrangeas should be mulched with 2-3 inches of shredded bark over their root zone after planting.

Pruning

Pruning is primarily divided between 2 methods. It is imperative that you know the variety of your hydrangea so that it can be properly pruned. Pruning a hydrangea incorrectly may lead to the absence of flowers during the growing season, but will rarely cause any long-term health issues.

Method #1: 'macrophylla', 'quercifolia' & 'serrata' hydrangeas

These types of hydrangeas typically bloom on 'old wood' – growth from the previous season. Flowers usually appear in June-July and the future season's flower buds form on the stems during late summer & early fall. These hydrangeas should be pruned immediately after flowering so they can produce buds for the next season. Do not prune these hydrangeas in late fall, winter or spring.

Method #2: 'arborescens' and 'paniculata' hydrangeas

The hydrangeas in this group flower on new wood – growth from the current season. Do not prune these hydrangea types in the late spring or summer since they are about to bloom on this year's new growth. Pruning is typically done in late fall or early spring. However, spent blooms can be left on the plant in fall for winter interest. 'Arborescens' hydrangeas should be cut back 12"-18" from the ground in early spring help prevent flopping during the upcoming season. 'Panicales' can be pruned to shape.

*****Exceptions*****

- Dead or broken branches can be removed at any time throughout the season.
- If your hydrangea is outgrowing its space, it can be pruned, but that may mean forfeiting blooms for the short-term. It is always good to choose a hydrangea that can grow to its full size without needing to be pruned to fit the area.
- After 5+ years of age, 1/3 of the living stems can be removed. This will revitalize the plant.
- 'Deadheading' spent flowers is not the same as 'pruning'. It is okay to cut off spent blooms during the growing season for any type of hydrangea. However, be careful not to cut too much of the stem on 'macrophyllas' and 'oakleaf' varieties so buds will not be removed for the following year.
- 'Endless Summer' and other re-blooming hydrangea varieties bloom on both 'old' and 'new wood'. However, experience has shown that most still flower much better off of 'old wood'.