

Growing Hydrangeas



Oakleaf Hydrangea

Hydrangea macrophylla, Mophead Hydrangea, and *Hydrangea serrata*, Lacecap Hydrangea, have long been popular in our area for their long summer bloom season. The 'Pee Gee' group of hydrangeas, *Hydrangea paniculata*, have large flowers in late summer that start white and age to pink, and can be dried for long lasting floral arrangements. The Oakleaf hydrangeas, *Hydrangea quercifolia*, are prized for their ornamental oakleaf-like foliage with its deep maroon fall color. Lesser known species also thrive in our cool summer climate, including the large growing *Hydrangea aspera*, Feltleaf Hydrangea, and *Hydrangea augustipetala*, Fragrant Hydrangea. Another great hydrangea for our region is *Hydrangea anomala* or Climbing Hydrangea. This vine can eventually cover a large structure.

Cultural Information

Soil:

Hydrangeas will thrive in many soil types. In the wild, they are generally found as understory plants in woodlands, growing in humus-rich, well drained soils. All hydrangeas benefit from organic matter at planting. Often the color and intensity of the flowers on Lacecap and Mophead (*Hydrangea macrophylla* & *serrata*) will depend on your soil pH. If you have moderately acidic soils (most of the Pacific Northwest), you can make the soil more alkaline by adding 2 cups of lime to the planting hole. To increase the acidity, add a generous amount of organic matter (rotted sawdust, bark) to the soil at planting. If your soil is very acidic (pH below 5.5) or very alkaline (pH above 7.0) it will be difficult to adjust the pH enough to change the color of the flowers. Many of the newer Hydrangea cultivars are not sensitive to pH and have stable flower color.

Water:

Give regular supplemental summer water for the first 2 years after planting, and during dry spells thereafter. Hydrangeas can be an indicator of dry soil, wilting if they are not getting enough water. Oakleaf hydrangeas are slightly more drought tolerant than other species.

Light:

In the Pacific Northwest, hydrangeas can be grown in full sun or in partial shade. In full sun, they will need more frequent summer watering. They perform well in dappled or half day shade, but need extra water if they are competing with tree roots. Deep shade will decrease flowering.

Fertilizer:

Hydrangeas benefit from a light spring application of fertilizer. Any woody plant fertilizer will work, both conventional and organic based. Flower color in pH sensitive hydrangea cultivars is actually dependent on uptake of available aluminum in the soil. Acidic soils facilitate the uptake of aluminum, enhancing the blue tones. Neutral to alkaline soils inhibit aluminum uptake, enhancing pink tones. If your hydrangea cultivars are sensitive to pH, annual applications of sulfur (for blue) or lime (for pink) can help keep those tones dark. Some cultivars are color stable, so no fussing required.



Winning Edge Hydrangea

Pruning Hydrangeas

Each Hydrangea species responds differently to pruning. Pruning can be done in early spring, or just after flowering. Prune according to the groups below:

- ***Hydrangea macrophylla* and *serrata* (Bigleaf, Lacecap, and Mophead Hydrangeas)** These plants bloom mostly on stems produced the previous year. The best pruning method removes old (already flowered) stems to the ground leaving younger stems to flower. If the young stems are multi-branched, thinning them will give you larger flowers.
- ***Hydrangea paniculata* (Pee Gee Hydrangeas)** These bloom on current year's growth. Prune in early spring to shape or control size, or just remove old flowers above a strong bud.



White Moth 'Pee Gee' Hydrangea



Climbing Hydrangea

- ***Hydrangea aspera* (Feltleaf) and *quercifolia* (Oakleaf)** Prune young plants to create many stems at or near ground level. Older plants; remove old or spent flowers.

- ***Hydrangea anomala v petiolaris* (Climbing Hydrangea)** Prune to remove dead wood or to control size. This vine clings to its support through aerial roots.

