

Hydrangea Care

Identifying Your Hydrangeas

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|  <p>Bigleaf (Also known as florist's hydrangea, hortensia, mophead, or lacecap) <i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i> Hardy to USDA Zone 5</p> |  <p>Panicle (Also known as peegee hydrangea) <i>Hydrangea paniculata</i> Hardy to USDA Zone 3</p> |  <p>Smooth (Also known as Annabelle hydrangea) <i>Hydrangea arborescens</i> Hardy to USDA Zone 3</p> |
|  <p>Climbing <i>Hydrangea petiolaris</i> Hardy to USDA Zone 4</p> |  <p>Mountain <i>Hydrangea serrata</i> Hardy to USDA Zone 5</p> |  <p>Oakleaf <i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> Hardy to USDA Zone 5</p> |

All Hydrangeas have similar cultural needs, requiring:

- Moist but well-drained soil (hydrangeas will not tolerate wet feet – ever!)
- Some sun each day. Most people think of hydrangeas as shade plants, but they look and flower best with at least four hours of sun, ideally in the morning. Panicle hydrangeas are the most sun tolerant, and can take full sun in northern climates.
- Plenty of water, especially as they are getting established. Hydrangeas have shallow roots, so they dry out quickly. A two to three inch thick layer of shredded mulch is a useful addition to any hydrangea planting.

Flowering

The trickiest thing about hydrangeas is that different types have different flowering habits. **Panicle and smooth hydrangeas** flower on new wood (growth created in the current season). Flower buds on these hydrangeas form after the plant leafs out in spring, and open a few months later in summer. As a result, these plants flower reliably each year no matter how cold the winter. **Bigleaf, mountain, oakleaf, and climbing hydrangeas** flower on old wood (growth created in the previous season). Flower buds on these hydrangeas begin to form in late summer and must remain undisturbed all through the fall, winter, and spring in order to flower the following summer. As a result, **these plants will not flower if:**

- They are pruned. Pruning at any time will remove potential flower buds.
- They are browsed by deer, which will eat the flower buds.
- They are damaged by weather. Winter weather isn't actually the problem; rather, it's in spring when several days of warm temperatures are followed by a sudden freeze, that flower buds are most likely to be damaged.

Reblooming hydrangeas, also known as remontant hydrangeas, are types of bigleaf and mountain hydrangeas that have the unique ability to flower on both old and new wood. Even if the buds are damaged in winter weather, the plant can still flower on wood it produces that season. Reblooming hydrangea varieties include **'Endless Summer' series** & **'Forever & Ever' series**.

Pruning

- Avoid pruning reblooming hydrangeas and those that flower on old wood, altogether. Instead, site these hydrangeas appropriately so they do not need to be pruned, and choose varieties that do not get too big for their space.
- New-wood flowering hydrangeas can be pruned each early spring, just as new growth begins to emerge. Remove up to 1/3 of the height each year if desired to encourage vigorous new growth and strong stems to support the flowers.
- Hydrangeas do not strictly require regular pruning. They will grow and flower well with nothing more than removal of spent flowers and any dead wood each early spring.

Color

All hydrangeas undergo some color change as their flowers age, but only bigleaf and mountain hydrangeas can change their color in a predictable, controllable way. It is not the pH of the soil that is responsible for this change – it is actually the presence of aluminum in the soil.

- Certain varieties of bigleaf hydrangeas cannot change color – generally speaking, the more intense the color, the less likely it can change. Similarly, white varieties of bigleaf hydrangeas will not change color.
- It is easier to change a hydrangea from pink to blue than from blue to pink, but both endeavors involve making chemical application in specific amount at specific times. A soil test is necessary to determine the best course of action. If you decide to try to change the flower color, shop for products, such as Hydrablue Aluminum Sulfate, carefully and read all directions.