

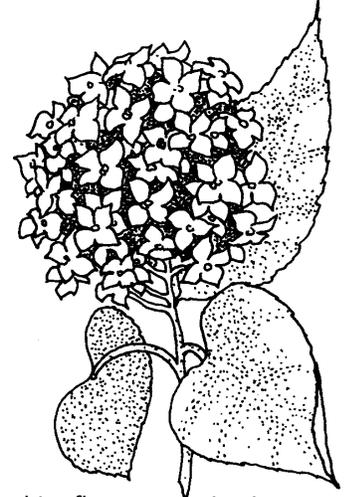


# Heavenly Hydrangeas

Care-Pruning-Selection

## Commonly Available Species

- **Bigleaf Hydrangea** (a.k.a. French Hydrangea, Garden Hydrangea) (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) - The most popular and commonly grown group of hydrangeas which includes the favorite blue and pink mophead hydrangeas. Flowers are produced in summer and are either “mophead” or “lacecap” in form. Mopheads have large, rounded clusters of flowers that are composed mainly of large sterile florets. Lacecaps have a flat heads composed of a ring of large sterile florets around a central cluster of tiny fertile flowers, and have a more delicate and dainty effect. Color of bigleaf hydrangeas varies from pink to blue (sometimes white) and is dependent on the pH of the soil and the amount of aluminum it contains. See the section on **Flower Color** for more information. Most bigleaf hydrangeas grow to about 4-8' depending on the cultivar. Similar to bigleaf hydrangeas but generally smaller and with smaller leaves and flower clusters is ***Hydrangea serrata***. This species and its cultivars generally grow to about 3-5'. They also tend to be more cold hardy.
- **Panicled Hydrangea** (*Hydrangea paniculata*) - This species is a large grower to about 10-20' and can be trained into a small tree. It grows quickly and produces large pyramidal panicles of white flowers starting in mid-summer. As the season progresses the flowers change to pink and stay attractive until about September. Panicled hydrangeas prefer to get some sun, though not a full day's worth, and require regular moisture.
- **Oakleaf Hydrangea** (*Hydrangea quercifolia*) - A trouble-free native plant that is excellent for southern gardens. It bears erect panicles of white-changing-to-pink flowers from June through July and later. Its attractive, lobed leaves are dark green and then change to spectacular scarlet and burgundy in fall. Oakleaf hydrangeas generally grow to about 4-6' tall, sometimes 8' or even taller depending on cultivar. Best with afternoon shade.
- **Smooth Hydrangea** (*Hydrangea arborescens*) - This species does well in full shade and grows to about 3-5' tall. In early summer, it produces large globe-shaped flower clusters that start out apple green and gradually turn white. If the old flowerheads are pruned off, the plant will re-bloom in Aug.-Sept. The 'Annabelle' cultivar is most commonly available and is one of the showiest.



## Basic Culture

All hydrangeas prefer to be planted in moist, well-drained, fertile soils. When planting, amend the soil with leaf mold, and/or compost along with soil conditioner to improve drainage if you have a clay soil. One of the best ways to improve drainage is to build up a raised bed or a mound and plant in that. If conditions become dry, you will probably have to supply additional water, especially to plants that are still getting established. On hot days, you may notice drooping leaves on plants, even those that you know are well-watered. This is temporary and just a reaction to the heat and the plant's inability to replace water being lost through the leaves quickly enough. If the plants haven't had rain or irrigation recently, though, it's probably a good idea to get the hose out. Mulch your hydrangeas to insulate roots against heat and conserve moisture in the soil. Hydrangeas should be sited in areas where they will receive morning sun and afternoon shade or in bright, dappled shade. Smooth Hydrangeas, such as 'Annabelle' will grow in full shade. **FERTILIZING:** Feed hydrangeas with a balanced slow-release granular food or organic fertilizer in April-May making sure that the formulation is not too high in nitrogen (the first number of the 3-digit sequence on the package), such as Plant-tone or Garden-tone. If there has been a lot of rain, you may wish to fertilize again in July.

Hydrangeas are generally vigorous, fast-growing, and long-lived plants that are seldom bothered by pests and disease. Their main problem is leaf spot diseases which generally occur late in the season and are common in our humid climate. This is more of a cosmetic issue than something that affects long-term plant health. Additionally, since the disease occurs late in the growing season, consider whether treatment is practical since plants will be losing their leaves shortly. If you decide to treat, use a broad-spectrum fungicide, such as Fung-onil.

**IF YOUR HYDRANGEA REQUIRES TRANSPLANTING**, it's best to do it before it leafs out in spring or after the leaves start to drop in fall. Avoid transplanting during times of heat and drought.

## Pruning

Pruning requirements for hydrangeas vary by species. Most **Big-leaved hydrangeas** (*H. macrophylla*) bloom on old wood produced the previous year. For this reason, the best time to prune them is right after flowering so that they have time to produce flowering wood. If you prune them in spring, you will prune off flower buds. Pruning is not essential but it can enhance flowering. On established plants cut back thin, weak shoots and one or two of the oldest stems to the base of the plant. The previous year's flowering branches can be pruned back by as much as 12 inches. Cut these back to fat buds. You can also prune to control size at this time. **Panicle Hydrangeas** (*H. paniculata*) produce flowers on the current season's growth. Therefore, the best time to prune them is in late winter or early spring just before the plants begin active growth. Again, pruning is not required, but the plants tend to flower better with annual pruning. On established (mature) plants, cut back the previous season's growth to its lowest pair of healthy buds. **Smooth Hydrangeas** (*H. arborescens*) and **Oakleaf Hydrangeas** (*H. quercifolia*) require minimal if any pruning. If you do decide to prune to control size, for example, prune them in late winter or early spring.

## Flower Color

Color on big-leaved hydrangeas (*H. macrophylla*) varies from pink to blue (occasionally white) and is usually dependent on the pH of the soil they are growing in and the amount of aluminum it contains. The same cultivar of big-leaved hydrangea can produce completely different flower colors when growing in soils of different pH ranges and aluminum content. Generally, acid soils, such as ours, in the 5 to 6 pH range produce blue flowers on big-leaved hydrangeas, while more alkaline soils will result in plants with pink flowers. Sunlight can also affect flower color making white hydrangeas redden or colored hydrangeas fade with too much light. You can change flower color on colored hydrangeas by applying a liquid soil drench. To turn hydrangeas blue, dissolve a tablespoon of aluminum sulfate in a gallon of water and drench the soil around the plant in March, April, and May. A gentler, more environmentally friendly but slower method, is to use an organic fertilizer for acid-loving plants such as Holly-tone. Apply to the plant in spring and again in early summer. To make flowers pink, dissolve one tablespoon of hydrated lime in a gallon of water and drench the soil around the plant in March, April, and May. Avoid getting the solution on the leaves. This treatment will not change flower color on white hydrangeas. Additionally, a hydrangea's natural tendency toward a certain color will affect its ultimate degree of blue or pink.

## Reasons Your Hydrangea Didn't Bloom

**No. 1:** Incorrect pruning. If you prune the common big-leaved hydrangeas too early, such as in spring, you will cut off the flowering wood. See the Pruning section for details.

**No. 2:** Late frosts. This is not as common in the Piedmont of NC but it still occasionally happens. A late frost can damage buds that have already started to break dormancy in spring weather.

**No. 3:** Too much nitrogen. If you are feeding with a high nitrogen fertilizer, switch to a lower nitrogen, higher phosphorus fertilizer such as 15-20-15. Nitrogen is represented by the first number in the 3-digit ratio sequence.

**No. 4:** Not enough sun. Hydrangeas are shade tolerant but they need some sun. Strike a balance by planting in morning sun and afternoon shade or where the plant will receive some late afternoon (non-frying) sun, or, if possible, remove lower limbs of overhead trees to open up the canopy and provide more light.

**No. 5:** Not enough water. This can be a problem in drought years. Be sure to supplement with water if it's dry.

## Varieties That Rebloom

Reliable Rebloomers - (pink to blue flowered unless otherwise noted)

**Mopheads:** 'David Ramsey', Endless Summer™, Blushing Bride™, 'Madame Emile Mouillere' (white), 'Oak Hill', 'Penny Mac', Forever 'n Ever Series, Nantucket Blue

**Lacecaps:** 'Lilacina', Twist-n-Shout

**Opportunistic Rebloomers** - Opportunistic rebloomers will rebloom in long, mild autumns but can have buds destroyed by early frosts (pink to blue flowered unless otherwise noted)

**Mopheads:** 'All Summer Beauty', 'Altona' (lilac to purple), 'Blue Danube', 'Europa', 'Kluis Superba', 'La Marne', 'Nikko Blue', 'Souvenir of the Visit of Pres. Doumier'

**Lacecaps:** 'Coerulea Lace', 'Lanarth White' (white), 'White Wave' (white)

