



## Hydrangeas

Since there are hydrangeas for every light situation from shade to full sun, it is easy to find one for *your* garden. On the other hand, if you've fallen in love with a specific cultivar, you must *find* the perfect site. The notes on the next page will help you to make this choice. It bears stating from the outset, however, that *H. macrophylla* needs the most shade, preferring only up to 4 hours of sun. *H. arborescens* and *H. serrata* are happiest in part sun, or 4-6 hours, preferably morning sun. Afternoon sun in St. Louis can be stressful to hydrangeas and only sun-loving (6 hours) *H. paniculata* and *H. quercifolia* are up to it. In the heat of the summer, though, supplemental water will help keep them all stress-free.

### Preparing a Hydrangea Bed

- If you were thinking of digging a hole and dropping in the root-ball, why not think again? Hydrangeas look better and fare better with artful designing, thoughtful planning, and careful preparation of our native clay soil.
- Plan the layout of your bed using the mature width of your plants as a guide so they won't become crowded.
- Dig down about a shovel's depth – about 10"-12" – breaking up and loosening the soil in the entire bed.
- Add *Turface* to improve drainage, help aerate compacted clay soils and aid in moisture retention. Amend the soil if needed with 3"-4" of *Dr. Earth Mother Land Compost* or other high-quality compost.
- Once the beds are prepared, place your hydrangeas in pleasing arrangements of threes or fives. For each plant, dig a hole slightly bigger than its pot. It should be deep enough that the top of root mass is slightly above grade.
- Carefully loosen each hydrangea's root system, set it in the hole, spread the roots somewhat and backfill.
- Continue with all the hydrangeas and thoroughly water the area to settle in the soil. Rake the bed smooth and mulch.

### Preparing a Specimen Hydrangea

- If your hydrangea will not be part of a prepared bed, you will need to dig a more substantial hole. It should be twice as wide and just as deep as the pot. Mix the soil you have removed 50/50 with compost and some *Turface*.
- Carefully loosen the root system, set the hydrangea in the hole with the top of the root mass slightly above grade.
- Gently backfill around the roots and water in to settle the soil, adding more if needed. Any leftover compost/soil mix should be formed into a raised circle just below the dripline. Add mulch over and within this watering well.

### Caring for Hydrangeas

- Mulch year-round to a depth of 3"-4", keeping the mulch well away from the trunk of the shrub.
- Hydrangeas are moderate to high feeders. Beginning with the first spring after planting, apply a slow-release fertilizer such as *Espoma Plant-tone 5-3-3* each year in early spring before leaf emergence and then again after flowering.
- Be particularly vigilant with watering the first two seasons. All hydrangeas, however, usually need supplemental watering in the heat of summer and during dry spells year-round. Drip irrigation is best, especially with large plantings.

# Pruning Hydrangeas

- *H. arborescens*: Plants may die to the ground in harsh winters, coming back with vigor. Likewise, pruning close to the ground in late March before leaf emergence will revitalize the plant and encourage robust stem growth. Cultivars with large flower clusters (e.g., ‘Annabelle’), however, may need the extra support of the previous year’s branches.
- *H. macrophylla* and *H. serrata*: Usually need little pruning but if you wish to shape or reduce size, prune immediately after flowering (late July) cutting back to a healthy set of leaves and remove up to a third of older stems at ground level to thin. *H. macrophylla* cultivars that bloom on old *and* new wood (e.g., ‘Endless Summer’) may be pruned more vigorously – from a third to half the branch length. More daring gardeners may wish to try tip pruning as the leaves emerge in spring which releases apical dominance and promotes lateral flower buds – to achieve a more aesthetic shape and increase blooming.
- *H. paniculata*: During the first years of establishment, prune back by a third in late March to encourage branching and blooming. Mature plants may be pruned each spring as needed for best shrub form.
- *H. paniculata* Tree Form: Until firmly established, you may prune up to ½ of top growth in late fall to reduce ice and snow toppling. Otherwise, prune in late March, removing up to ½ of top growth to shape and promote branching.
- *H. quercifolia*: Need little pruning except when young to promote branching, otherwise, prune as for *H. macrophylla*.
- *H. anomala* subsp. *pet*, *Schizophragma hyd*: Prune if needed in late winter if branches become too wild or bushy.

## General Characteristics for Seven Hydrangea Species

Botanical / Common Name	Zone / Origin	Typical Size	Bloom Time	Typical Flower / Foliage	Notes
<i>H. arborescens</i> Smooth or Wild Hydrangea	3-9 Eastern United States	3-5’ x 3-5’	June – Sept on new wood	snowball or flattened clusters / serrate, ovate leaves, with yellow fall color	part shade, consistent water, easy care
<i>H. macrophylla</i> Bigleaf Hydrangea	6-9 China, Japan, Mexico, Central & South America	3-6’ x 3-6’	July – Aug on old wood, some on old <i>and</i> new wood	lacecap or mophead, soil pH affects color / large, serrate, ovate leaves	part to full shade, plentiful water, easy care
<i>H. paniculata</i> Panicle Hydrangea	3-8 China, Japan	8-15’ x 6-12’	July – Sept on new wood	pyramidal panicles / ovate leaves	full to part sun, drought tolerant, very adaptable
<i>H. quercifolia</i> Oakleaf Hydrangea	5-9 Southeastern United States	6-8’ x 6-8’	May – July on old wood	conical panicles / oak-like, lobed leaves, with reddish-purple fall color	full sun to shade, medium water, easy care
<i>H. serrata</i> Mountain Hydrangea	6-9 Japan, Korea	2-4’ x 2-4’	June – Aug on old wood	smaller mophead, soil pH affects color / smaller, serrate, ovate leaves	part shade, plentiful water, medium care
<b>Vines</b>					
<i>H. anomala</i> subsp. <i>petiolaris</i> Climbing Hydrangea	4-8 Japan, Korea, Taiwan	30-50’ x 5-6’	June – July on old wood	fragrant lacecap / glossy, serrate, rounded leaves, with yellow fall color	part to full shade, drought tolerant, easy care
<i>Schizophragma hydrangeoides</i> Japanese Hydrangea Vine	5-8 Japan, Korea	20-30’ x 6-9’	June – July on old wood	large lacecap / serrate, heart-shaped, silvery blue leaves, with yellow fall color	part to full shade, medium water, easy care