



## Hydrangeas

Beautiful and vivacious, the ultimate in flowering summer shrubs, there's a hydrangea available for every gardener's taste!

### *choosing your site*

- Since there are hydrangeas for every light situation from shade to full sun, it is very important to select the correct site for the hydrangea you prefer or, alternatively, to choose the best hydrangea to suit your available situation.
- 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. *H. paniculata* and *H. quercifolia* prefer 6 or more hours of sun but can be happy with as little as 4.
- In this case, part sun refers to morning sun. Exposure to afternoon sun during St. Louis summers is very debilitating to hydrangeas and only *H. paniculata* and *H. quercifolia* are up to it. Even so, remember they may need supplemental water.

### *preparing a hydrangea bed*

- If you were thinking of digging a hole and dropping in the rootball, why not think again?
- Hydrangeas look better and fare better in a garden bed that has been thoroughly prepared. Native clay soils need to be opened up and lightened with amendments so that the hydrangea's root system can access both water and nutrients.
- Plan the layout of your bed using the mature width of your plants as a guide.
- Dig down at least a shovel's depth – about 10-12 inches – breaking up and loosening the soil throughout the entire bed.
- Depending on the quality of the soil at your chosen site, amend with 3-4 inches of organic matter – such as Dr. Earth Motherland compost, aged manure, or decomposed leafmold – and mix it with the native soil to a depth of a shovel blade.
- Adding Soil Perfector or Turface is always a good investment. Shake it out over the compost and dig it in at the same time.
- Once the beds are prepared, it is a simple matter to dig a hole as big as your hydrangea's pot. It should be deep enough that the top of root mass is slightly above grade.
- Carefully loosen the root system, set the hydrangea in the hole and gently replace the soil around the roots.
- Do not compact the backfill, but thoroughly water the area, which will serve to fill any void that may exist.

### *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 or Soil Perfector.
- Carefully loosen the root system, set the hydrangea in the hole with the top of the root mass slightly above grade.
- Backfill gently and water it in. Any leftover compost/soil mix should be formed into a raised circle (a watering well) around the shrub right below the dripline.

### *caring for hydrangeas*

- Mulch year-round to a depth of 2 inches, 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.
- Hydrangeas will need supplemental watering in the heat of summer and during dry spells year-round. Drip irrigation is best.

## 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 (i.e. ‘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 (i.e. ‘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 wish to 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 promote branching and a pleasing shape.
- *H. quercifolia*: Usually need little pruning except when young to promote branching, otherwise, prune as for *H. macrophylla*.
- *H. anomala*, *Schizophragma*: Prune if needed in late winter if branches become too wild or bushy.

## selecting your hydrangea

The hundreds of hydrangea cultivars available in all the species provide a range of colors, textures, sizes and habits. This list, however, gives an overview of the general characteristics of seven hydrangea species. Remember: right plant/right place!

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, 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 and 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/lobed, oak-like leaves, 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, 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, yellow fall color	part to full shade, medium water, easy care