

How to Prune and Care for a Hydrangea

First of all, you don't have to prune if you don't want to! Just clean out dead wood, and trim back dead flowers to the first live buds.

As there are many types of hydrangeas, pruning and care of hydrangeas may differ slightly with each.

- The most common types of hydrangea are the Mopheads and Lacecaps (*H. macrophylla* – big leaf). These are the varieties with large, globe-shaped flowers that many of us remember as kids. Prune these in late summer, right after they finish blooming. Thin out $\frac{1}{4}$ of the stems, and snip back the branches to just above live buds.
- The Oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*) is another commonly grown variety. With its unique fall color and oakleaf-shaped foliage, this variety usually provides year-round interest. Tolerates drier conditions. Oakleaf is best pruned in late winter/early spring.
- Panicle (*H. paniculata*), or Pee Gee, exhibits white, cone shaped flowers in summer. Prune to remove spent blooms and thin or cut back the plant in late winter/early spring.
- *H. arborescens* Smooth hydrangea, (Annabelle), can be pruned (to the ground) each winter or early spring as well.
- The hydrangea vine or climbing hydrangea (*H. anomala*) doesn't usually require pruning but may be done in order to keep the new shoots under control.

Hydrangeas do not like extremely hot conditions, so plant them in an area with afternoon shade. They aren't fussy, but they prefer rich, moist soil that drains easily. They enjoy deep watering at least once a week, especially in dry weather. Compost prior to planting is helpful, as is a layer of mulch. Organic fertilizer or compost once or twice a year in spring and early summer is appreciated too.

Hydrangeas in Containers

Choose a large container (at least 18 to 20 inches in diameter) for your hydrangea. If your container doesn't have holes for drainage, drill some into the bottom. Water that stands around the roots can cause rotting. Tip – put a layer of Styrofoam peanuts, or gravel at the bottom for drainage.

While you don't have to use dwarf hydrangeas in pots, you may want to if your space is limited. Hydrangeas don't just get tall; they also get bushy. Otherwise, plan on doing some pruning as your plants grow. Caution: while you're doing your research, check to see if your variety flowers on old or new wood. If you prune at the wrong time of year, you'll lose next year's flowers.

Use a good quality potting soil with organic matter, not ordinary garden soil. Plant the hydrangea at the same level that it was in its original pot (that is, don't plant it deeper or higher than it was already growing). Leave some room below the rim of the pot, so you can water. Gently firm the soil around the roots to eliminate air pockets.

When the top inch or so of the potting mix feels dry, water your hydrangea thoroughly. Although it's better to underwater than overwater, hydrangeas will signal you by wilting when they need a drink. That can stress them, so check them every day or so. After a little while, you'll get a feel for how often to water. You may need to step up your watering in periods of drought or high temperatures.

Hydrangeas don't need a lot of fertilizer, but you can feed your plants once or twice a year with an organic balanced fertilizer, or compost. Don't fertilize after July or August; feeding later encourages tender, new growth, just when hydrangeas need to start going dormant for the winter.

HYDRANGEAS



With immense flower heads, **hydrangeas** have an old-fashioned charm that is hard to resist. Colors are beautiful, with clear blues, vibrant pinks, frosty whites, lavender, and rose. Easy to grow, these are a summer staple in our area, a must in any partly shaded area.

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MOPHEAD HYDRANGEAS (prune right after blooming)

- **CityLine Mars** – 1 – 3' tall. A small plant with showy magenta and white summer flowers. Long lasting flowers. Mildew resistant. Soil pH affects bloom color. Salt Tolerant.
- **Mariesii Variegata** - 'Mariesii' is part of the lacecap group (flattened flower clusters consisting primarily of small fertile florets, with a few scattered, showy, sterile ones often forming a marginal ring). It is a deciduous shrub with a rounded habit, which typically grows 3-4' tall.
- **Nikko Blue** - 'Nikko Blue' has large flowers arranged in globular or "mophead"-like groups. It is a deciduous shrub with a rounded habit, which typically grows 4-6' tall. Features clusters of pink or blue florets in big, rounded, 4-5" mops, which bloom in June (often earlier than other varieties) for up to two months. Large, lustrous, medium green foliage.

PEE GEE GROUP (prune late winter)

- **Limelight** - Excellent, compact cultivar that typically grows to 6-8' tall and as wide. It produces large, dense, upright, cone-shaped (to 8" across) flowers that change color on the shrub as they mature. Flowers emerge creamy white, mature to chartreuse-lime and eventually acquire pink-darkening-to-rose tones before finally fading to beige. As the flower show fades in fall, dark green leaves (to 4" long) turn attractive shades of red. Flowers may be cut for fresh arrangements or for drying, or may be left on the plant where they will last well into winter. Can be pruned into a small tree.
- **Little Lime** - Compact cultivar that typically grows in an upright rounded mound to 3-5' tall and as wide. It's particularly noted for its large mophead type flowers to 5" tall by 4" wide, emerging soft light green but maturing to pink and burgundy in fall. Compact, upright-mounded shape, free branching habit and strong stems hold the panicles upright with no drooping. Flowers typically bloom from July through September. Dark green leaves (to 2 1/2" long) are attractive during the growing season, but produce generally undistinguished fall color. Flowers may be cut for fresh arrangements or for drying, or may be left on the plant where they often persist into winter.
- **Pinky Winky** - Adaptable, but prefers moist, rich, loamy soil. Soil pH does not affect bloom color. Prune back late winter/early spring. Apply fertilizer in spring. Two-toned pink and white flowers. 5' – 6' tall eventually.
- **Fire Light** - Blooms emerge creamy-white and age to a vivid red for lots of summer color. It makes a great cut flower, fresh or dried. 5' – 6' tall.

OAKLEAF GROUP (NATIVE, prune late winter)

- **Munchkin** - a dwarf, compact shrub with dark green foliage that turns mahogany red in fall. Its white, 6.5 in. inflorescences are held upright above the foliage and gradually turn pink as they age. 'Munchkin' grows 3 to 4.5 ft. tall and wide.
- **Ruby Slippers** - compact form 3-4' tall and to 3-5' wide, and known for its compact size, large upright flower panicles, ruby red mature flowers, mahogany red fall foliage color and exfoliating bark. Upright, elongated, conical flower panicles (to 9" long) of showy, flowers begin bloom in late spring. Flowers emerge white, but quickly turn pink before finally maturing to ruby red. Distinctive, deeply lobed, somewhat coarse, deep green, oak-like leaves (to 5" long) turn attractive shades of mahogany-red in autumn. Mature stems exfoliate to reveal a rich brown inner bark, which is attractive in winter.

SMOOTH HYDRANGEAS (NATIVE, prune late winter, can be cut to the ground to control size)

- **Annabelle** - Deciduous shrub with a rounded habit, which typically grows 3-5' tall. Clusters of white flowers appear in huge, symmetrical, rounded heads, which typically grow 8 -12" across. Blooms in June for up to two months, sometimes with a small repeat bloom in the fall (cutting off dead flowers will encourage this). Dark green leaves (3 - 8" long).

REBLOOMING GROUP (can be pruned anytime)

- **Endless Summer** - Hydrangea macrophylla perennial shrubs that have the unique ability to re-bloom throughout the spring and summer months, giving more color and visual appeal to your garden for a longer period of time. Blooms on both old and new growth. Known to bloom 10 to 12 weeks longer than average Hydrangea macrophylla plants.

DRYING HYDRANGAEA FLOWERS

Harvest the heads when the flowers have matured and developed a papery consistency. Remove leaves from stems, and hang upside down in a warm, dry, dark, airy room. When completely dry (usually a couple of weeks), store in a dry location out of direct sunlight. To enhance flower color, spritz dry flowers with diluted Rit dye.