

# HYDRANGEA SPECIES & VARIETIES

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Hydrangea is a large genus with over 80 species of deciduous and evergreen shrubs and climbers, though it is generally the deciduous shrubs that are common in our gardens. Hydrangeas are among the easiest ornamentals to grow, thriving in a variety of climates and conditions from north to south and coast to coast. They want a humus-rich soil, ample moisture and relief from midday sun. Add an annual pruning specific to the species and the needs of these garden favorites are fairly well met.

***Hydrangea anomala ssp. petiolaris*** is the one of the few vines in the genus Hydrangea. This variety is a slow starter until its roots are firmly established - usually two to three years after planting – but will take off rapidly once it gets settled in. In vigor and elegance it is unsurpassed, reaching up to 60 ft. by means of self-clinging, aerial rootlets and bearing an abundance of rich green, heart-shaped leaves. The white flower is a flat, lacy cluster of both fertile and sterile blossoms borne on stiff, erect stems in mid-June and into July. General pruning, although not usually necessary, is best done immediately after blossoms fade. This plant will generally take a few years to really start climbing.

***Hydrangea seemanii*** really doesn't fit in anywhere but here. It is an evergreen climbing form that is relatively new to gardeners in this area. Generally hardy in our zone, it may reach up to 20'-30', although it will probably stay smaller depending on the circumstance. Flowers are similar to *anomala ssp. petiolaris*.

***Schizophragma hydrangeoides*** is also lumped into this "Climbing Hydrangea" group. Actually, many people really can't tell much of a difference between this and *anomala ssp. petiolaris* unless they get right up to them. The main differences are that the leaves aren't as glossy (some forms taking on interesting silvery undertones), the plant will be about half the size (maybe 30'), and this plant won't develop the massive structural frame common to the true climbing Hydrangea. It is pretty much a smaller, more delicate looking form of *anomala ssp. petiolaris*. The variety '**Roseum**' has pink-rose bracts.

***Hydrangea arborescens*** This fast growing, elegant show-off usually forms a rounded spreading shrub from 4 to 6 feet tall with a spread of 5 to 8 feet. Flat-topped clusters, 4 to 6 inches across, of small greenish white flowers, larger sterile flowers may be present along edges of cluster, appear in June. Sometimes the plant will flower a second time early in the fall. The stem has a peculiar tendency to peel off in several successive layers of thin, different-colored bark, hence the common name of "sevenbark." This plant often dies back during the winter, and if it's not pruned in early spring, the flower clusters become small. '**Annabelle**' is the commonly preferred variety, with monstrous flowers sometimes reaching up to 1 ft across!

***Hydrangea macrophylla*** has long been admired for its voluptuous, pink-to-red or blue-to-purple flower clusters. *H. macrophylla* has a rounded habit to about 5-6 ft. with bold, serrated, light-green leaves to 8 inches in length, which in some varieties are creamy-margined. The six to ten inch flower clusters consist of both sterile (showy) and fertile (nearly inconspicuous) blossoms. There are two distinct flower types of *H. macrophylla*, the best known being those with globe shaped heads of primarily sterile flowers. These are the original "hortensias" of our grandmothers' gardens also known as **mopheads**. The other is the **lacecap** type, having an inner cluster of fertile flowers surrounded by conspicuous sterile blossoms, giving a lacy appearance. Lacecaps also tend to develop more color variation between the different parts of the flower, adding some nice contrasts.

Pruning can be accomplished at two different times. Late summer is more desirable, since most\* hortensia types flower only from the end buds of upright or lateral shoots produced during late summer and fall of the previous season. Prune as soon as the flowers have faded and strong shoots are developing from the lower parts of the stems and crown. Stems that have flowered should be cut back by 1/3 to just above a strong developing bud. Remove at the base some of the weaker new shoots, and thin out some of the older woodier growth. Always try to keep several stems of old productive wood, with a sufficient number of stout new stems that will flower the following season. Early spring pruning (March), although acceptable, will often result in the sacrificing of bloom for that growing season. Pruning this species too late in the fall (after September) is harmful and will result in the new growth, both vegetative and reproductive, not developing to proper maturity.

\*Some varieties will bloom on new growth. While it is usually best to treat them just like the others, you can usually prune these much harder and earlier and still get flowers (albeit a little smaller).

'Angel Lace' – Pink or blue flowers trimmed in white

'Angel Song' – Pink or blue flowers trimmed in white.

'Ayesha' – Lilac-like flowers, generally pink to light blue.

'Buttons and Bows' – Deep pink flowers, white margins, dwarf plant.

'Claudie' – A unique lace-cap with a bright ring of star-like blooms.

'Endless Summer' – Blue-Pink Flowers, blooms prolifically (on new growth)

'Glowing Embers' – Intense glowing red-pink

'Lady in Red' - White lacecaps mature to a deep rose, with green leaves changing to purple in fall.

'Lanarth White' – Large white flowers surrounding small fertile blue or pink blushed flowers.

'Lemon Wave' – Foliage is green/white/lemon yellow variegated

'Nigra' - Smaller rich pink blooms, black stems

'Nikko Blue' – Vigorous growing, probably the best blue form

'Pia' ('Pink Elf') – A dwarf (24") pink

'Princess Beatrix' – A smaller plant with bright pink blooms

'Red Star' – A great performer with red flowers

'White' - White flowers. You cannot change the colors of this flower!

***Hydrangea paniculata***, native to China and Japan, is the giant of the genus. A mature specimen, well kept and in the right place is a sight to behold. From July to September this graceful beauty is covered with pyramidal, opulent clusters of snowy white, then pink-tinged to dusty-purple and finally, warm-wheat flower heads. With an upright habit becoming gracefully vase shaped and arching with age, it will reach 25 ft. with a spread of about 15 ft. Most often it is grown as a large shrub or a small tree to 12 ft.

Pruning involves the removal of dead flowers, if unattractive, and an annual corrective pruning of vigorous shoots. Thin and/or cut back the previous season's growth in late winter or early spring, since flower clusters occur on newly developing branches. Without regular pruning, this hydrangea can rapidly become quite overgrown and out of scale in the landscape. It can, however, be developed into a single or multi-stemmed tree form.

'Grandiflora' ('PeeGee') – Large flowers, full (sterile) clusters, probably the most common variety.

'Limelight' – Lime-green flowers take on a rosy hue later in summer/fall

'Tardiva' – Later flowering than most, sterile/fertile flower mix give a layered/lacy appearance.

***Hydrangea quercifolia*** is known as Oakleaf hydrangea due to its deep green oak-like leaves which mature to glorious oranges and reds in the fall. This species brightens the garden with erect, showy clusters of white blossoms, appearing in mid July. With its wonderful foliage and ornamental peeling bark, this lush hydrangea produces a woody feel if left unpruned. When selectively thinned, the plant makes a distinctive specimen or container plant. Prune back in early spring to remove dead wood. Cut back to below the point of injury and remove old wood to the base. This species tends to be tougher than the rest of its family, and will take much more heat, drought, and general abuse than most others.

'Alice' – A great variety with exceptional vigor, huge white flowers (age to rose-pink), and wonderful fall color. May reach 10'x10'...

'Little Honey' – A newer, dwarf variety with golden foliage.

'Sikes Dwarf' - Abundant ivory-colored conical blooms on a 3'x4' bush.

'Snow Queen' – A little less robust than 'Alice' (6' or so), with strong flowers and good fall color.

***Hydrangea serrata*** is closely related to *H. macrophylla* (some call it a subspecies) but is generally smaller and more graceful in appearance. You will not find the huge "macrophylla mopheads" here, but what you will find are charming smaller shrubs with a lot of personality in both flower and foliage. This form tends to be very free-flowering, with graceful slender stems and narrower more delicate foliage, yet is also considered to tougher and more hardy than *H. macrophylla*. The flowers also tend to be smaller, usually in more of a lacecap form.

'Bluebird' – Generally blue lacecap type, early flowering and prolific, red fall color

'Golden Sunlight' – Golden-yellow foliage and pinkish-red flowers. This is one of the few golden foliaged plants that actually looks attractive (really, it does) with the flowers.

'Preziosa' – A free-flowering "mini-mophead" that starts pink and ages to a crimson red.