

All Things Hydrangeas

***Hydrangea macrophylla* (Big Leaved Hydrangeas):** These are for a shade or part shade garden – morning sun only or filtered light are the ideal locations. Select old-fashioned beauties for larger specimens, or choose from the numerous newer, repeat flowering and more dwarf varieties. All of these new generation Hydrangeas bloom on both old and new wood. Now you can have a smaller plant that does not care how you prune it – now that makes your life easy as a gardener!

Feed Hydrangeas regularly, beginning in spring (early March) and continue every 6 weeks or so into mid-summer. A number of different fertilizers can be utilized, but the best is an organic granular like ‘Rose and Flower Food’ or ‘Rhododendron Food’ from E.B. Stone Organics. ‘Ultra Bloom’, also from E.B. Stone Organics, will really kick in the buds and blooms if your plant requires more Phosphorus. Remember to mulch and water them regularly in the summer – Hydrangeas love water! Flowers will always turn blue here in the PNW in our typically acidic soils (and feeding with the ‘Rhododendron Food’ will help), but you can play with color by adjusting your soil pH – potentially adding color all the way from pastel pink to red to blue to purple. The ‘Rose and Flower Food’ will help keep the flowers more pink to red. Use ‘Aluminum Sulfate’ for more acidic soil (blue/purple), or ‘Potassium Nitrate’ for alkaline soil (pink/red). Again, it is all about the pH in YOUR soil that will dictate the color of flowers each season.

There are the mophead or lacecap flowers to choose from. The ‘Let’s Dance’ series from Proven Winners, the ‘Endless Summer’ series (including the fabulous newer ‘Summer Crush’) and the ‘Seaside Serenade’ series are all easy, small-growing repeat bloomers. The entire ‘Seaside Serenade’ series from Monrovia is fabulous – ‘Fire Island’, ‘Cape Cod’, ‘Cape May’, ‘Hamptons’, ‘Cape Lookout’, ‘Newport’, ‘Cape Hatteras’, ‘Martha’s Vineyard’ and others. For 2022, the Seaside Serenade Series added two great varieties – ‘Glacier Bay’ (white lacecap with black stems) is very striking, and ‘Crystal Cove’ (beautiful bi-color lacecap with frilled edges). The ‘Endless Summer’ Series from Bailey Nurseries says it all – this group of Hydrangeas are all nice compact, blooming machines for the garden. The latest addition to the Endless Summer collection is ‘Summer Crush’.

Want to introduce some foliage color to the shade garden? There is a beautiful purple leafed variety called ‘Miss Saori’, a dwarf hydrangea with double bicolor flowers that are white with rose red coloring – these are always this color and will not change to blue. A couple of varieties mentioned above in the ‘Seaside Serenade’ series also sport purple tipped foliage and nice flowers, like ‘Fire Island’ and ‘Hamptons’. With a little bit of sun, these all will add a nice purple cast foliage throughout the season. New varieties with both repeat bloom and foliage come out every year – be sure to see what is new at the nursery for 2022!

Don't forget about old-fashioned classics, especially if you have the room for larger specimens - these old-wood bloomers make great additions to shade gardens. 'Nikko Blue', 'Glowing Embers', and numerous others are still available to us home gardeners. The difference between "old school" ones and "new school"? You just can't prune these old-fashioned ones back hard or you will be forced to skip a year of flowering.

***Hydrangea serrata* (Mountain Hydrangeas):** A bit more hardy than big leaved types, they will show off superior fall color and will take a bit more sun as well. Flat lacecap flowers adorn these hydrangeas all summer. Most are nice large growing specimens that are wider than tall. Try many of the newer, smaller, repeat bloomers that are easy to grow for long summer color. 'Tuff Stuff Red' is a nice new variety from Proven Winners and there are also some cool double flowering lacecaps like 'Wedding Gown'. If you have the room, oldies like 'Blue Bird' and 'Red Wings' are awesome bloomers that make great background specimens.

***Hydrangea arborescens* (Smooth Hydrangeas):** These summer beauties can be clipped into a spectacular blooming hedge or can make nice shrubs for any sunny spot. They produce large, round mophead flowers in white ('Incrediball') or pink ('Invincible Spirit') - almost basketball size flowers, eventually! An impressive and easy to grow sun shrub. New dwarf varieties, like 'Limetta' and 'Wee White', have small compact growth each season, also consider 'Invincible Ruby' with darker ruby tinged flowers!

***Hydrangea quercifolia* (Oak Leaved Hydrangeas):** This species boasts some cool serrated large foliage that has top notch color in fall. They produce white cone-shaped flowers during summer that turn a bit pink as the season progresses. Has a nice sprawling growth habit that will cover some area, if needed. These will grow in part shade or sun. Also has some cool exfoliating bark to look at over the winter. There are numerous flavors around, including some dwarfs like 'Ruby Slippers' and 'Munchkin' - a couple newer ones with showy blooms. 'Jetstream' is another newer variety with very clean foliage and nice habit as well from Bailey Nursery. Lots of options for Oakleaves!

***Hydrangea paniculata* (PG Hydrangea):** They thrive in hot sun to part shade and are one of the best sources for long color, summer through fall! These produce large cones of flowers that vary in size depending on variety, but they all open lime green/white and progress through shades of pink to red over the summer until frost. There is good fall foliage color on these as well. Large growers include 'Berry White', 'Pinky Winky', 'Vanilla Strawberry' and 'Limelight'. There are also some great dwarf, tidy growers like 'Little Lime', 'Strawberry Sundae', 'Bobo', 'Candied Apple', 'Strawberry Shake', 'Baby Lace' - the list goes on and on! Make sure to see 'Diamond Rouge', a newer variety from Bailey Nursery that ages to bright red. The latest introduction from Bailey is 'Little Hottie', a compact little blooming machine! The best attribute of all PG's is that they bloom on new wood each year, so it doesn't matter how far you cut them back in the spring!

As far as new for 2022, there are some great new PG's arriving. 'Limelight Prime' (stronger stems and blooms), 'Little Lime Punch' (dwarf with more red color), 'Firelight Tidbit' (touted as best compact grower) and 'Early Evolution' (first to start blooming) all look like great additions to our PNW gardens.

PG varieties can also easily be trained into a tree shape with a single stem. These are the perfect solution to home gardeners looking for a small landscape "tree" that blooms all summer. Be sure to check out the varieties available in tree form.

***Hydrangea anomala 'Petiolaris'* (Climbing Hydrangea):** Grows quickly for a great sun or shade vine. Will stick to wood, concrete and most other surfaces for good coverage. Produces nice white lacecap flowers in late spring, has excellent yellow fall color, AND some awfully cool peeling cinnamon brown bark for winter interest. Want some variegation? Check out 'Miranda' or 'Firefly' with yellow/green foliage! Be sure to plant these variegated forms in part shade or morning sun only.

***Hydrangea aspera* (Rough Leaved Hydrangeas):** A very unique plant that has large, almost tropical looking, foliage and impressive large lacecap flowers over summer. These will get pretty big as they grow, so give them some room to mature. A great 8'+ large shrub/small tree for shade or part shade areas. Check out the 'Plum Passion' from Dan Hinkley with spectacular purplish foliage!

***Hydrangea integrifolia and Hydrangea seemannii*:** Two unique evergreen climbing Hydrangeas that will hold their foliage through winter and produce white lacecap flowers in summer. Grows pretty slowly and will attach itself to most things - try on shady fence, arbor, trellis or even up a large tree. Be patient as these will take a couple of years to start blooming and they are also a little harder to come by at nurseries.

To summarize...

- Give all Hydrangeas plenty of summer water and regular fertilizer
- Pick the proper specie for sun/shade/part shade
- Use 'Aluminum Sulfate' to turn soil acidic (deeper blue or purple) on *H. macrophylla*. This is sold as "Hydrangea Blueing Formula".
- Use 'Potassium Nitrate' to turn soil alkaline and get pink to red blooms on *H. macrophylla*. This is often sold as "Stump Remover".
- Make sure you know whether you have a new or old wood bloomer for pruning, and select the appropriate variety for your space keeping pruning in mind.
- Try to deadhead flowers in late fall and clean out dead wood/structure issues in the dormant season. Cut back stems in early March for the season, but be careful knowing if you have a new or old wood bloomer.
- Most blooms make great dried flowers for indoor arrangements.

- There are new exciting flavors being introduced every year!
- Growing them in a pot? Use neutral potting soil to turn them pink to red. Use an acid planting mix to turn them from blue to purple. Keep in mind that plants you purchase will be in a neutral potting mix from growers – they may be showing pink or red blooms – but in our acidic soils they will turn towards blue to purple typically.
- Plant Hydrangeas as single specimens for summer color, or add multiple ones mixing up flower forms and colors for added interest in the garden.
- Look at the choices Hydrangeas offer – there are some fun and unique bloomers to be found for your garden, including some cool foliage as well.
- Remember that if you want a long blooming summer shrub, you cannot beat Hydrangeas in the landscape – some for sun and others for shade!