

Hydrangeas

Hydrangea plants are a garden favorite known for their cloud like flowers as one of the few showy shade tolerant plants. Preferring moist, well-drained soils, hydrangeas are pH sensitive and prefer acidic soils with ample organic matter. If you are preparing to plant hydrangea for the first time or hoping to improve already existing plants a soil test is a great place to start. There are five main types of hydrangea with various needs and a variety of features to choose from.

Smooth Hydrangea (*arborescens*)

This is one of the easiest hydrangeas to grow with large, smooth leaves and large, white flowers. The flowers bloom from late spring into summer with flowers changing color, from green to white. After blooms begin to brown, they should be removed to encourage a second, late summer boom. Smooth hydrangeas prefer partial sun or shade and moist soils with high organic matter. The shape of the smooth hydrangea is arching with the overall height between 3-5 feet. In later winter, shrubs should be cut back to 6 inches and fertilized at this time. The most popular and well known of this species of smooth hydrangea is 'Annabelle'.

Bigleaf Hydrangea (*macrophylla*)

These hydrangeas are named for their large, dark-green, waxy leaves. Flowers last 4-6 weeks and bloom during July and August. A common mistake made with this hydrangea is pruning. Flowers are born on old wood so pruning should only occur just after flowering has finished. There are two primary flower forms for Bigleaf hydrangea; lacecaps with sepals that ring non-showy inner flowers, and the hortensias, which form large balls of four-petaled sepals. Bigleaf hydrangea are often a visual indication of soil pH. In alkaline soils flowers are pink whereas acidic soils produce blue flowers. These shrubs will grow to be 3-5 feet tall and wide.

PeeGee Hydrangeas (*paniculata*)

PeeGee has flowers that are 6-8 inches long and white. Flowers appear in July and August on the current year's growth. This means pruning can occur in late winter or even early spring without risking loss of flower. 'Grandiflora' is the most common PeeGee cultivar which grows 10 to 15 feet tall. PeeGee prefer sun to partial shade and needs well drained soils to thrive.

Oakleaf hydrangeas (*quercifolia*)

Oakleaf hydrangeas have beautiful leaves with lobes that resemble an oak leaf. Leaves are dark-green in the spring and summer, turning burgundy in the fall. The foliage stays intact into winter and has a peeling bark making this an excellent plant for fall and winter interest in the garden. These hydrangeas have June flowers that last for several weeks often changing from a white to a pink color as they mature. Oakleaf hydrangea prefer partial sun and acidic soil—again high in organic matter. Growing from 4-6 feet tall, these hydrangeas will sucker and make excellent mass plantings.

Climbing hydrangea (*anomala* subsp. *Petiolaris*)

These hydrangeas grow as a woody vine with lengths up to 60 feet! The woody stems of the climbing hydrangea adhere to nearly any structure so place the plants carefully as they're difficult to remove. Foliage of these plants is dark green with stems having a shredding bark. Flowers are fragrant, appearing from June to July and turn from green to white as they age. Climbing hydrangea are adapted to sun or shade and tolerate most soils. Vines live for many years and often have few issues once established in the landscape.