

## Hydrangea Happiness

With C.L. Fornari

### Mopheads and Lacecaps

- Plant hydrangeas in well drained soil. Amend entire beds with compost or composted manure in a 1 to 2" layer over surface of the soil, instead of amending the planting hole. Mulch bed with 1 to 2" layer of mulch.
- Water deeply every few days depending on the weather. A hydrangea will wilt on a very hot day or when in full sun...this doesn't mean that the plant needs watering. If it recovers after sunset the ground is still moist enough.
- Fertilize in spring with a general, granular organic fertilizer. Don't overdo.
- Mopheads are the ball-shaped flowers. Lacecaps have small, fertile interior flowers surrounded by infertile, larger flowers. Mopheads are usually *Hydrangea macrophylla*, but lacecaps can be *H. macrophylla* or *H. serrata*. Those in the serrata species can be a *bit* more bud hardy.
- Both these species form the majority of their flowers the year before they bloom. So in August these plants have the germ of next year's flowers. This is referred to as "flowering on old wood."
- Some varieties also make a few flowers at the end of new growth in the fall. These are called remontant varieties. In order to see these flowers on the new growth you need a long, warm fall. Best known remontant is Endless Summer.
- The most common reason mopheads and lacecaps don't flower is that the buds get zapped by winter cold or late spring frosts. If you live where the winter temperatures drop below 5 degrees F. for any length of time, those buds will probably get killed, even with protection of wrapping, leaves, hay etc.
- You can grow hydrangeas easily in containers and keep in a place where it's cool but not below freezing in the winter. Reintroduce the plants to the "real world" gradually in the spring.
- Another reason for not flowering is if someone cuts the canes down, spring or fall. For best flowering only prune out dead wood once the plant has started to make leaves. If the canes are always bare for you in the spring, with new growth coming from the ground, you're in an area that is probably too cold to grow these plants in the landscape.
- Mopheads won't flower very well in deep shade.
- Plant these hydrangeas in morning sun but shade from 10 or 11 on for the longest lasting flowers. If plants are in full sun they will wilt frequently, and this will cause the flowers to brown quickly.
- Most macrophylla and serrata varieties will change color according to the soil pH. They will be blue in acid soil, pink in alkaline soil. To change from blue to pink, spread lime around the plants twice a year. Scatter it inside the group of canes and at least 2 feet beyond dripline. To turn pink to blue, use sulfur or aluminum sulfate. (Follow directions for all products. *More isn't better*. Note that it takes time, days or weeks, for color to change.)
- White flowers will always be white but the macrophylla and serrata varieties with a slight pink or blue blush will alter according to the pH.
- Color depth is genetic – light blue flowers will be pale blue or pale pink, but never dark blue or dark pink.

- Most mopheads open up with green or cream colors in the flowers, and then the colors deepen as the flowers age.
  - Flower color changes in the fall. Mophead flowers can be dried once they change from sky blue to lavender blue and start to look papery. To dry, remove leaves and put cut stems in a vase without water. Keep away from light/windows for longest lasting color.
  - Leaf spot on hydrangea leaves is caused by frequent splashing of water. Avoid watering frequently and/or use soaker hoses or drip lines.
  - Group Hydrangeas together for best use of water. Do not plant hydrangeas with drought-tolerant plants such as junipers.
  - In some areas thrips or mites attack the leaves. Clean up fallen leaves in fall and spring for best control. Thrips overwinter in the organic debris under the plants.
  - Deer problems: spray with a repellent made of egg, milk or blood. Deer are vegans. Or use Wireless Deer Fence: [www.WirelessDeerFence.com](http://www.WirelessDeerFence.com)
  - Occasionally you see some green larvae/caterpillars on hydrangeas. Handpick or spray with Spinosad or Bt. Usually such larvae fall under the "acceptable level of damage" approach.
  - Occasionally hydrangeas get powdery mildew. Organic fungicide if desired.
- Download my handout on how to prune mopheads and lacecaps:  
[http://gardenlady.com/wp-content/uploads/how\\_to\\_prune\\_hydrangeas.x16893.pdf](http://gardenlady.com/wp-content/uploads/how_to_prune_hydrangeas.x16893.pdf)

### **Smooth and Panicle Types**

*Hydrangea arborescens* = smooth hydrangea

*Hydrangea paniculata* = panicle hydrangea

Most hardy into Zone 3. They flower on this summer's growth, so a cold winter isn't a problem! They do well in part shade to full sun. (White smooth hydrangeas may brown out in full sun in hot climates. Avoid noon heat.)

### **Smooth Hydrangeas**

Annabelle widely available, flowers tend to pull stems over, especially after rain. Flowers start green, turn white, then back to green.

Incrediball is more stem-sturdy. Some call this an "improved Annabelle."

Wee White is a very short variety.

Pink smooth hydrangeas: Invincibelle Sprit II (dark pink), Blush (light pink), Mini Mauvette (shorter).

Green smooth hydrangeas: Limetta, Lime Ricky

Stake using a bamboo pole in center, run string out around individual stems and back to stake. Bring some stems upright, some at an angle for a natural look. Pictures here: <http://coffeeforroses.com/how-to-stake-flopping-hydrangeas/>

Hydrangea Leaf Tier – (*Exartema ferriferanum*) – moth lays egg early in the summer. Snap off the "packets" with larvae inside and throw them away.

Clip off flowers in fall? Optional.

### **Panicle Hydrangeas**

*Bigger varieties are great in mixed flowering shrub borders or as part of privacy screens.*

*Hydrangea paniculata* – can grow shrub into a tree form the “old fashioned way” by pruning off lower limbs and letting plant grow tall.

*H. paniculata* ‘Grandiflora’ - PG aka peegee hydrangea. Huge flowers.

Limelight Improved: Flowers start out green & turn white then pink.

Zinfin Doll: Huge, rounded flowers, deep pink color, large shrub.

Quick Fire: earlier to flower, earlier to turn pink, tall plant.

Fire Light: Deep pink to burgundy in the fall. Larger plant.

Little Quick Fire: Smaller size (around 3 to 4 feet in ground, smaller in pots)

Pinky Winky: a bit more upright growth habit, especially if minimally pruned. Good background or screening variety. Turns pink from bottom up.

#### Sorter varieties:

Bobo, Little Hottie, Fire Light Tidbit, Lava Lamp Flare

### **Pruning smooth hydrangeas**

1. Remove dead canes and old flowers.
2. Remove some outer canes at ground level if it’s spreading too wide.
3. A little off the top if desired.
4. Can be cut down low or to ground, but the canes will be weaker the first year and plant will flop.

### **Pruning panicle types**

1. Remove dead canes and old flowers.
2. Look for stems going into the center of the plant and remove. You want to encourage a vase shape, branches arching out from center to outside.
3. Look for crossed branches and remove one. (Rubbing makes wounds.) Some crossed branches will be removed in step 2.
4. Cut down by up to a third if needed, cutting in a round shape.

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