

All About Hydrangeas

By Jan Corsello

Hydrangeas are one of our most popular summer flowers, gracing our gardens with big colorful blooms from midsummer until frost. They are easy to care for and have few pests or diseases. Hydrangeas thrive in zones 3-8, and most prefer shade. As an added bonus, deer rarely eat them.

There are several different varieties of hydrangeas. Most popular are the big leaf, or snowball hydrangeas, also called mop-head. Unpruned, this shrub grows to about six feet tall and wide, and the flowers are about six inches in diameter. They are long-lasting as a cut flower and are beautiful in arrangements.

Lace cap hydrangeas have flowers that are light, airy and flat and about six inches in diameter. Their outer petals are the most showy, and their inner petals are tiny and insignificant. Although lovely in the garden, they are not suitable for flower arrangements, as they wilt overnight.

Oakleaf hydrangeas have upright flower panicles that start out tiny and white and grow to about 12-18 inches tall. As summer progresses, the flowers darken to a lovely mauve. Their leaves gradually turn red, for great autumn interest, and their brown exfoliating bark is interesting in the winter. They make decent but messy cut flowers, as the petals quickly drop. Cut them before they get too big to avoid this problem. They grow best in full sun to partial shade and prefer an alkaline soil. Unpruned, these shrubs will grow to about 12 feet tall and wide. There are also dwarf varieties.



Proper pruning produces great results.—Photo by Jan Corsello

Climbing hydrangeas (*hydrangea anomala petiolaris*) are vines, about a quarter inch in diameter, rather than shrubs. They can grow to 50 feet and are beautiful trained up a stone wall or a large tree. They attach to the wall the same way ivy does, with little root-like “feet.” Their small flowers are always creamy white, and the leaves are a deep glossy green. Their exfoliating bark gives

year-round interest. Their growth is mainly from the tip of the vine, but they do have side shoots—and they prefer full sun.

The flower color of mop-head and lace cap hydrangeas can be changed by adjusting the PH of the soil. PH ranges between 1 and 10. A PH of 7 is neutral. Below 7 is acidic; above 7 is alkaline.

Blue hydrangea flowers prefer an acidic soil. The addition of coffee grounds or aluminum sulfate will help to acidify the soil. A fertilizer mix for azaleas and rhododendrons works well and adds more nutrients than limestone alone. The

flower color change takes several seasons. To turn the flowers pink, add lime to the soil. Pelletized limestone works well, as do egg shells. Read the directions on limestone, and don't add too much. Again, the color change takes time. Some hydrangeas have been cultivated to bloom in a particular color regardless of the soil PH, like the Nikko Blue and Limelight, which is white with a touch of pale green.

Like crepe myrtles, hydrangeas will benefit if you prune out dead or dying branches anytime. For branches that rub, choose the one that you want to keep, and prune the other to the ground. Most hydrangeas, like azaleas, bloom on “old wood.” Prune just after blooming or in late fall. You don't want new growth to be killed by frost. Pruning just after blooming will allow new growth to “harden off.” Prune just above a bud that is growing toward the outside of the shrub. Prune off any branches growing toward the interior. If you prune in the spring, you will be removing flower buds.

Fertilize hydrangeas in the spring, just as the leaves break out. 10-10-10 or a slow-release fertilizer works well. A top dressing of compost also adds nutrients to the soil. Fertilize again just before blooming. Use a high phosphorus fertilizer to promote large blooms.

If you have questions, consult your garden center, extension service, or gardening books. An internet search will lead you to many helpful articles.

Crystal Coast Hazardous Waste Collection Pine Knoll Shores Realty

On Friday, April 29, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., we will be accepting Household Hazardous Waste at our office parking lot. The items will then be taken to the Carteret County Health Department in Morehead City for their spring collection on April 30. If you cannot get your items to our office, give us a call and we will work out a pickup time at your residence.

Items that will be accepted are:

- Latex and Oil Paints
- Used motor oil
- Lawn and Garden Fertilizer & Pesticides
- Farm Pesticides
- Gasoline
- Drain Openers
- Paint Thinners
- Cooking Oil
- Anti-Freeze
- Batteries
- Small electronic items



Friday, April 29, 2022 – 8 a.m. - 1 p.m.

PINE KNOLL SHORES REALTY
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For questions or to schedule a pickup,
please call 252-723-7972 and ask for Amy.