

# HYDRANGEAS: Types and How to Prune

Six hydrangea types most commonly grace our landscape many of which require different methods of pruning. First, one must know the identity of the hydrangea growing in the landscape so the proper pruning procedure can be implemented.

Most hydrangeas thrive given:

- ◆ **Full sun or partial shade**, depending on the cultivar. Avoid hot, dry, sites
- ◆ **Moist, well-drained soils** enriched with organic matter. Mulch with 2-3 inches of bark mulch or other organic mulch to conserve moisture.

When is the best time to prune hydrangeas?

It depends on the type and when they produce flower buds. *See table for guidance.*

**Why aren't they blooming?**

There are three possibilities:

- ◆ **Too much shade**
- ◆ **Improper pruning** (by humans or deer)
- ◆ **Winter damage to stems, or frost damage to flower buds** - especially likely with bigleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) and mountain hydrangea (*Hydrangea serrata*).

**Nifty Note:**

Look for newer cultivars of bigleaf hydrangea that bloom on last summer's (old wood) and current spring (new wood) growth. Cultivars such as 'Endless Summer'®, 'Blushing Bride'™, 'Red Sensation', 'Double Pink' will bloom again on the current year's growth if you remove faded blooms regularly.

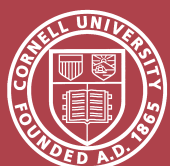


Oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*)



Panicle hydrangea (*H. paniculata*)

Hydrangea Type	Best Time to Prune	Zone	Popular Varieties	Notes
Bigleaf hydrangea, French hydrangea ( <i>H. macrophylla</i> )	Right after bloom, in summer; prune winter damaged stems in late spring, after leaf-out	6 - 9	Nikko, Forever Pink, Dooley, Endless Summer	Blooms in spring, early summer, then flower buds produced on summer growth Native to Asia
Mountain hydrangea ( <i>H. macrophylla</i> var. <i>serrata</i> )	(same as above)	5 - 9	Bluebird, Preziosa	(same as above)
Smooth hydrangea ( <i>H. arborescens</i> )	Late winter, early spring, before leaf-out; can cut back to 6" - 12" above ground	4 - 9	Annabelle, White Dome	Flower buds produced on spring/early summer growth, then blooms mid-summer Native to Eastern United States
Panicle hydrangea ( <i>H. paniculata</i> )	Late winter, early spring, before leaf-out	4 - 7	PeeGee, Tardiva, Limelight, Pink Diamond	Flower buds produced on spring growth, then blooms mid-summer Native to Asia
Oakleaf hydrangea ( <i>H. quercifolia</i> )	Right after bloom, in summer; prune winter damaged stems in late spring, after leaf-out	5 - 6	Snow Queen, Snowflake, Syke's Dwarf	Blooms early summer, then flower buds produced on summer growth Native to Southeastern United States
Climbing hydrangea ( <i>H. anomala</i> subsp. <i>petiolaris</i> )	Usually not necessary, except to remove damaged wood	5 - 8	Petiolaris	Native to Asia



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*Hydrangea arborescens*  
(Smooth-Hydrangea)

Broad, mounded shrub with smooth, light green leaves. It prefers morning sun and afternoon shade. Most bloom white. Prune each winter or early spring because it flowers abundantly on new growth. If a larger shrub is desired, prune less severely. However, it can be pruned to ground level each year since it blooms on new growth.



*Hydrangea paniculata* 'Grandiflora'  
(PeeGee Hydrangea)

This is the most commonly planted Hydrangea because of its massive displays of large white flowers in mid to late summer. They gradually turn to pink and remain on the plant in a semi-dried condition long after the leaves have fallen. It is tolerant of full sun conditions. Pruning involves the removal of dead flowers, if unattractive, 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 become quite large. It can, however, be developed into a single or multi-stemmed tree form.



*Hydrangea macrophylla*  
(Bigleaf Hydrangea)

Is a commonly grown Hydrangea with large, globe-shaped flowers. Blooms can be mop-head or lace-cap forms. Flowering is more profuse in a sunny location. Flower color is dependent upon the pH of the soil in which it is grown - blue if acid - pink if alkaline. There are also several white flowering cultivars. Prune immediately after it blooms as soon as the flowers have faded. 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), will result in the sacrificing of bloom for that growing season. Pruning this species too late in the fall (after September) is harmful because it eliminates flower buds and any new growth will not develop proper maturity before winter. This group often has winter kill of the stems causing the plant to die back to the ground. Winter protection of the plant is helpful to preserve buds for next years flowering. Tie the shoots together and wrap with burlap. If left unprotected, delay any pruning until the buds swell in order to determine dead wood to be removed, and then cut back to below the point of injury. There are some newer cultivars that bloom on last summers' (old wood) and current spring (new wood) growth.

*Hydrangea quercifolia* (Oakleaf Hydrangea)  
Photo on front.

Easily grown in organically rich, medium-moisture, well-drained soils. This plant is grown primarily for its handsome oak leaf-shaped foliage, excellent fall color, attractive flowers, and interesting winter bark. Although more ideally suited to a lightly shaded or protected location, if grown in an exposed site, it is subject to some winter dieback. Oakleaves bloom only on old wood. Prune after flowering (little pruning is usually needed however). Prune out weak or winter-damaged stems in early spring. Plants should be given a sheltered location and winter protection particularly when not fully established. Plants can lose significant numbers of flower buds or die to the ground in harsh win-

ters (temperatures below -10 degrees F), thus respectively impairing or totally destroying the bloom for the coming year.



*Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*  
(Climbing Hydrangea)

Climbing hydrangeas are slow growing, woody vines that cling to structures by aerial roots; mid-summer flowering on old wood with flat, lacecap type flowers. Requires very little or no pruning. If certain shots have grown out of bounds, reduce their length in summer immediately after blooming.



*Hydrangea serrata* (Mountain Hydrangea)

This is closely related to Bigleaf Hydrangea and they are often confused. Mountain Hydrangeas are more drought tolerant. Slight shade is best. They bloom in both mophead and lacecap forms and most bloom on old wood. Any pruning should be done immediately after they bloom. Any winter-killed branches can be removed in spring once it's obvious they are not alive.