

## Hydrangeas More Than You Ever Wanted to Know (MTYEWTK)

When I first got interested in hydrangeas, I have to admit I considered the ones I had seen to be kind of “grandma plants” not worth a place in my garden. Then one day at the Washington Park Arboretum I ran into a magnificent hydrangea *aspera* in peak flower and a new “kick” was born. Maybe it was the hydrangea and maybe it was the fact that I am now a grandpa, but I fell in love. Since then, Bethany and I have scoured wholesale nurseries and botanical gardens to find beautiful hydrangeas for Lael’s Moon Garden and some of our favorites are described below.

This past winter was particularly difficult for many hydrangeas. It was really cold early and many hydrangeas suffered dieback at the branch tips. For some Hydrangeas this means few flowers this year as the flower buds are at the branch tips and were frozen. Be patient, take good care of your plants, don’t prune too hard or too late and next year they should bloom normally. Of course, another option is to select varieties that bloom on new wood or are rebloomers.



**Hydrangea aspera ‘Macrophylla’** has stunning lace cap flowers of soft purple with stark white sterile florets surrounding them. The plant has large, dark green fuzzy leaves and the flowers extend above the leaves giving it a distinctive look. (A friend called it the Hydrangea from Mars.) This is a large shrub growing to eight feet tall and wide. Afternoon shade is a must; it will sunburn in hot sun.

**Hydrangea macrophylla “Oregon Pride”** is a stunner. It has dark burgundy stems and strong pink mop head flowers. But there’s more! In our slightly acid soil it has a variety of flower colors all on one plant. Some flowers are the expected strong pink, some are a vibrant purple and some are shades in between. The combination just blows me (and most other people) away, but one customer told me, “I’d rather have one that isn’t confused.” I could probably make all the flowers

purple with an application of aluminum sulphate, but I really enjoy the variety of colors. Grows to about 5’ x 5’ and for us does best in afternoon shade.

**Hydrangea macrophylla “Endless Summer - The Original ®”** \* has traditional mop head flowers and its claim to fame is that it is a rebloomer – it blooms on old and new wood so it can be pruned whenever without sacrificing the next year’s flowers (not true of many hydrangeas macrophylla.) The color may be baby blue or pink depending on acid or alkaline soil. Grows to 4-5’ tall and wide and likes partial to bright shade.

*\* I have to jump on my soapbox for a moment to decry this marketing campaign. When the blue mophead reblooming hydrangea was first introduced, it was named ‘Endless Summer’. Then because that name was so good, each new rebloomer was named “Endless Summer Twist N*



*Shout”, or “Endless Summer Blushing Bride” –not only are the names too long, it has caused great confusion when customers search for the Endless Summer hydrangea. (Now I feel better) This is why when you ask for an endless summer hydrangea, we ask what color do you want?*

**Hydrangea macrophylla “Twist-n-Shout®”** (also part of the Endless Summer Hydrangea series) has lace cap flowers and it also blooms on old and new wood, making when to prune, an easy question. The color ranges from mauvey-blue to pink-lilac depending on acid or alkaline soil. Grows to 4-5’ tall and wide and likes partial to bright shade.



**Hydrangea macrophylla x serrata “Preziosa” or “Pink Beauty”** Mophead blooms begin in late June and continue through summer, in an ever changing color display. Soft shades of pale-lavender, blue or pink, change to rose with purple tints and shades of burgundy. The leaves also change from bright green to burgundy “Preziosa” grows to 5’ tall and wide in 10 years and does best in partial to bright shade.

**Hydrangea paniculata “Quickfire®”** has large panicles of white flowers that turn pink as they age. It blooms on new wood and earlier than most other hydrangeas. It can be grown in full sun to part-shade as a single-trunked tree or a multiple-trunked shrub. Every branch ends in a large a panicle of flowers, so when the plant goes dormant in the fall, the individual limbs should be pruned back to two sets of buds on the current year’s growth. This will cause the limbs to branch resulting in even more flowers the next year. Ultimate size is 6-8’ tall and 3-5’ wide.

**Hydrangea paniculata “Limelight”** has large panicles of lime-green flowers, blooming on new wood, that fade to pink in the fall. It can be grown in full sun to part-shade as a single-trunked tree or a multiple-trunked shrub. Pruning is same as for Quickfire, when the plant goes dormant in the fall, prune the individual limbs back to two sets of buds on the current year’s growth. Ultimate size is 6-8’ tall and wide.



**Hydrangea paniculata “Pink Diamond”** has large conical and fragrant white flowers fading to pink. It will tolerate full- to half-day sun. We offer this one already trained as a single-trunked tree that will grow to 6-8’. This is a sun tolerant hydrangea and will grow in full sun (with adequate water) to part-shade. Tree forms should be pruned hard when young to develop strong stems.

**Hydrangea paniculata “Pinky Winky”™** is similar to “Pink Diamond” above. It also has beautiful and fragrant white flowers fading to pink, producing a bi-color effect. Pruning is the same as the other paniculatas and it will grow in full sun (with adequate water) to part-shade to 6-8’.

**Hydrangea quercifolia “Alice”** has heavily textured leaves reminiscent of an oak leaf and panicles of white flowers held prominently above the foliage. This is a slow growers that benefits from cutting back when they are young to make them branch; eventually to 6’. The flowers occur on old wood, so prune after blooming and before late summer. The leaves have nice burgundy to red fall color and persist well into winter. Oak-leaf hydrangeas are



more drought tolerant than others once they are established and will grow in full sun or part shade.

**Hydrangea anomala “Petiolaris”** is a climbing vine with self clinging tendrils. It can be grown as a deciduous ground cover, staked to be a small contorted shrub, or allowed to climb a tree trunk (the bigger the tree the better). In time, this plant will form a woody trunk to support itself. The flowers are white lace cap in late spring. Light shade is best; it will take full sun once it is established if it gets regular water.

**Hydrangea anomala “Miranda”** is a climbing vine that at first glance looks like the plain green hydrangea anomala petiolaris commonly available, but it has subtly variegated foliage. Like the green leaved one, it can be grown as a deciduous ground cover, a small contorted shrub, or allowed to climb a tree trunk. It's slow to establish, but magnificent once it gets going. The flowers are white lace cap in late spring. Partial shade is best.

**Hydrangea arborescens “Incrediball ®”** – We have long sought this one. Said to have sturdy stems to support its incredibly large flowers, 8-12 inch white globes. This one blooms on new wood and depending on our weather, may bloom for months. It grows 4-5 tall and should be cut back each spring to 18-24”. Tolerates full sun, will also grow in part shade. This one is for our friends in colder areas, its rated hardy in zones 4-9; some sources say zone 3.



**Hydrangea arborescens “Invincibelle Spirit ®”** –This is the first pink flowering smooth hydrangea. It blooms on new wood and depending on our weather, may bloom for months. It produces flowers every year regardless of frost or pruning techniques. Grows 3-4' tall and should be cut back each spring to 18-24”. Tolerates full sun, will also grow in part shade. This one is also for our friends in colder areas, its rated hardy in zones 4-9. This plant is **“The only hydrangea that helps find a cure.”** For each plant sold, a portion of the sales are donated to “The Breast Cancer Research Foundation.”

Lael’s Moon Garden offers several other hydrangea varieties. Although differences in sun tolerance and pruning are noted above, there are a couple of common cultural practices that apply to all of them.

All hydrangeas require regular moisture to prosper. (“Hydro” prefix meaning water -“hydrangea”) If the weather is extremely hot or you (perish the thought) neglect to give them enough water, they will wilt almost instantly. If this should happen don’t panic and pronounce them dead. Instead, remain cool and serene and give them a good soaking. If they haven’t been dry too long, the chances are high that the next morning they will be back to normal and no one will ever know



you neglected one of your babies.

The second cultural requirement is that they like a well-drained porous soil with lots of organic matter. Heavy clay or boggy soils are not good for them. Anyone who has ever tried alcohol knows that a little may be good but a lot is not necessarily better. It's the same with water and hydrangeas. They need moisture, but they also need air around the roots or they will drown or suffocate.

Older hydrangeas can be revitalized with selective pruning. You may remove up to a third of the stems by cutting them off at the base. It is best to cut the oldest stems, leaving the younger stems that are loaded with buds. This pruning eliminates poorly flowering parts of the shrub, lets in more air and light and will encourage growth of new branches and thus more blooms.

The color of mophead and lacecap Hydrangea (*macrophylla*, *serrata* and *aspera*) flowers can be highly variable depending on the presence of aluminum and soil PH. (The white flowers of the *paniculatas* and oak leaf hydrangeas cannot be changed to blue or pink.) Acidic soils with aluminum will enhance the blue to purple tones and sweet or alkaline soils enhance the pink to red tones. Adding aluminum sulfate will both add aluminum and make the soil more acidic. Adding lime to the soil and or using a fertilizer high in phosphate makes the aluminum less available to the plant and thus heightens the pink tones. It may take several applications of lime to sweeten the soil and if your water is acidic it will negate the sweetness over time.

Our display/test garden has mature examples of almost all of the hydrangeas described above. They're in bloom now so what you see is what you get.

### **Drying Hydrangea Flowers**

Many bouquets can be made from an established hydrangea. The *paniculatas* are particularly good for this. Select the flowers at their peak, before they start to dry on the tree. The traditional drying method is to tie the blooms together and hang them upside down in a dark place to allow them to dry. Sometimes this works, sometimes it doesn't. Here's a tip from Ciscoe;

..."Cut them when the blooms are just beyond their peak, but still have vivid color, and put the stem of each flower in its own shot glass half-full of water. Each stem must be in its own shot glass. They'll rot if you put a bunch of stems in a vase with the appropriate amount of water. Prop the flowers up in a dark room and don't refill the shot glass. The flowers usually dry in two to three weeks. I've been using this method for years with great success."

Now you just need enough shot glasses for each hydrangea to have its own. What fun to accumulate a large supply of shot glasses!

