

Garden Center Guides



Hydrangeas

Tucked into a shaded corner of the landscape or planted in showy masses, hydrangeas have graced the landscape for many years. New varieties have expanded the southern charm of these plants

into northern zones, making them adaptable to the Kansas climate and more alkaline soils. Hydrangeas generally prefer moist but well-drained acidic soil high in organic matter. They grow best in partial sun to shade. Hydrangea species fall into five groups. While similar, requirements differ.

Care

The smooth hydrangea (*arborescens*) is one of the easiest to grow and very reliable. The most popular and well known of this species is 'Annabell'. Smooth hydrangeas are named for their large, smooth foliage. The plant has large white (snowball) like flowers that bloom from late spring into summer and change color from light green to white, and finally brown. Removing spent flowers often results in an additional flush of blooms in August. These plants do well in partial sun or shade. Plants should be cut back to 6 inches in late winter and fertilized. As with most hydrangeas, the plants prefer a highly organic, moist but well-drained soil. The shrub grows from 3 to 5 feet tall and the weight of the large flowers often cause the plant to sprawl, arching to the ground.

Bigleaf hydrangea (*macrophylla*) are named for their large, dark-green, waxy leaves. This hydrangea flowers during July and August. Bigleaf hydrangeas come in two forms: lacecaps with sterile blooms (sepals) that ring non-showy inner flowers, and the hortensias, which form large balls of four-petaled sepals. Flowers last 4 to 6 weeks, are born on old wood and should not be pruned until after flowering. These plants require lots of water and bloom pink in alkaline soils or blue in more acidic soils. In alkaline soil, pH can be adjusted by adding aluminum sulfate to get the more bluish colors. Perform a soil test to determine the soil's natural pH, then follow label instructions for adjusting acidity. Bigleaf hydrangeas will grow 3 to 5 feet tall and spread with maturity.

PeeGee hydrangeas (*paniculata*) includes the common 'Grandiflora' cultivar of this large hydrangea, which grows 10 to 15 feet tall. It is also found as a small tree and does well in sun or partial shade. Flower panicles are 6 to 8 inches long, white, and mature in July and August on the current year's growth. This variety can be pruned in late winter or early spring. It tolerates all soil types but not wet, poorly drained soils.

Oakleaf hydrangeas (*quercifolia*) are exceptionally stunning plants with a rough-textured foliage that resembles an oak leaf in shape. It has dark-green leaves with five to seven lobes that turn brilliant colors of red and burgundy in the fall. The foliage stays intact throughout the fall and well into winter. Oakleafs bloom in June, and panicle flowers last for several weeks, changing from white to pinkish with maturity. The flowers will continue to hang on the plant well after blooming. The papery brown bark peels off in strips, adding interest to the plant during the winter. Plant oakleaf hydrangeas in partial sun and moist acidic soil, high in organic matter. The oakleaf will tolerate more sun and heat than other types of hydrangeas. Oakleaf hydrangeas tend to sucker from the roots and look best as a specimen plant or mass plantings. They make outstanding border plants. The plant will grow in height and width 4 to 6 feet.

Climbing hydrangea (*anomala subsp. Petiolaris*) is a woody vine that can continue to grow to heights of 60 feet. As the plant ages, woody stems cement themselves to almost any structure and the plant develops papery shredding bark. Foliage is dark green, 2 to 4 inches wide and long. Branches form terminal fragrant flowers in June and July, changing from green to white and finally brown. Flowers persist for 4 to 6 weeks. Flat blooms have outer sterile sepals surrounding a fertile less-developed inner flower. This hydrangea adapts to sun or shade and tolerates a wide range of soils. Although slow to establish, vines are long lived and trouble free. Vines work well on walls, over rocks and on trees.

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