

Growing Hydrangeas in Indiana



Hydrangeas are easy-to-grow flowering shrubs that can provide color in the garden from mid-summer through fall. They are used as specimen plants and/or in shrub borders. The flowers of some species can be dried and used in flower arranging and crafts.

The name comes from the Greek *hydra* (water) and *angeon* (vessel). This refers to the shrubs preference for moisture and to the shape of the seed capsule.

Culture

Most hydrangeas are woodland plants and require moist, well-drained soil in partial shade. Full sun can bleach and scorch the flowers. Overexposure to sun and/or too little water will cause the leaves to droop. Supplemental watering is required during prolonged dry spells. Good deep watering is better than frequent shallow watering. Mulch will help retain moisture and suppress weeds. Fertilizer should be applied based on soil test results.

The majority of hydrangeas bloom on wood produced during the previous year, known as "old wood." These hydrangeas should be pruned after flowering. Hydrangeas that



flower on the current season's growth or "new wood" can be pruned in winter or early spring before growth takes place. Gardeners should know when the flower buds are produced before pruning to avoid removing the season's flowers. Flower buds may be killed by frost or cold winds.

Types of Hydrangeas

Smooth Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*)

Smooth Hydrangea is a fast-growing native shrub that will grow to 3-5' tall and wide. White flowers appear in late June through September on new wood. The plant can be cut to the ground in later fall or early spring. Propagation is best by soft-wood cuttings in May-June, or by division in late winter or early spring. Smooth Hydrangea is hardy in zones 4-9. Some cultivars: 'Incrediball,' 'Annabelle,' 'Invincibelle.'

Bigleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea macrophylla*)

Bigleaf Hydrangea blooms on wood produced the previous year. The shoots are often winter-killed so that no flowering occurs. Pruning should be done after flowering. This shrub grows quickly to 3-6' in height. The flowers are usually blue or pink in flat-topped clusters. The flower color of some cultivars is affected by the soil pH. Blue shades are produced in

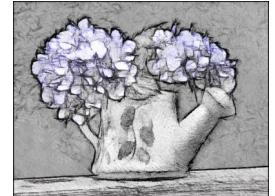
acid soils and pink shades in alkaline soils. Some cultivars do not turn blue even under ideal conditions. Propagate from softwood cuttings in May-July. Bigleaf Hydrangea is hardy in zones 6-9. Newer cultivars (such as the 'Endless Summer' series) have been developed to bloom on new wood, as well as on the previous season's growth. In either case, pruning should be done right after flowering. Some cultivars: 'Endless Summer' series, 'Twist 'n Shout,' 'Cityline' series.

Panicle Hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata*)

Panicle Hydrangea is the most cold-hardy hydrangea species. The white flowers appear on panicles 6-8" long in midsummer and are set on new wood. Pruning may be done in winter or early spring. This fast-growing shrub can reach a height of 10-20'. On older varieties, the flowers can weigh the branches down. Newer cultivars do not have the tendency to flop. Propagation is by seed or cuttings taken May-July. Panicle Hydrangea is hardy in zones 3-8. Some cultivars: 'Limelight,' 'Little Lime,' 'Pinky Winky,' 'Quickfire,' 'Little Lamb.'

Oakleaf Hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*)

Oakleaf Hydrangea is a slow-growing shrub. It will reach 4-6' in height and wider due to





suckering. The plant should be protected in zone 5. Stems and buds are subject to injury at temperatures below -10° F. Older stems exfoliate to expose a rich cinnamon-brown bark. The

white 4-12" long flowers bloom July-September. Flowering occurs on wood produced the previous year, so pruning should be done after flowering. It is prized for its autumn foliage color of red, orange-brown, and purple. Propagation is by seed, layering, division, or cuttings taken May-September. Oakleaf Hydrangea is hardy in zones 5-9. Some cultivars: 'Snow Queen,' 'Pee Wee.'

Climbing Hydrangea

(*Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*)

Climbing Hydrangea is an excellent clinging vine that grows 60-80' in height. Glossy green leaves are 3-4" in size, with white flower clusters from early June to midsummer. The plant is slow to establish, but will grow faster after roots are established. It will need adequate support, as the vine becomes very woody. Climbing Hydrangea is hardy in zones 4-7.



Can I change the flowers of my *Hydrangea macrophylla* from pink to blue?

The main influence that affects *Hydrangea macrophylla* flower color is soil pH, which is a measure of the soil's acidity or alkalinity. Much of Indiana's soil is slightly alkaline (pH 6.5), which will produce pink flowers. To produce blue flowers, the pH needs to be in the range of 4.5→5.5. Test the pH of your soil with an in-home soil-testing kit. If you have a pink hydrangea and would like to make it blue or purple, you need to lower the pH to make the soil more acid. This can be done by adding aluminum sulfate to the soil at the drip line of your plant. A good starting place is 1/2→1 cup per plant. Follow the label directions carefully to prevent burning your plant. Also important: you do not want to add too much phosphorus to your soil, as this element will interfere with the absorption of aluminum. Look for fertilizers designed specifically for low-acid plants (azaleas, rhododendrons, blueberries), or that are low in phosphorus.



Remember that hydrangea color changes are not predictable and will not occur overnight. It may take three years to see results. The plant's genetics and soil both play a part in manipulating its flower color. Still, it can be very exciting to see the results of your soil amendment and degrees of color change to your hydrangea.



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