

Oh, Those Hydrangeas!

The old-fashioned, timeless grace of a blooming hydrangea can offer a beautiful summer display, and yes - even here in Oklahoma! Give it a good home with proper site selection and good soil - both are keys to successful planting. Select a location with morning sun (four hours is good) and afternoon shade. Note that full shade will compromise blooming.

Hydrangeas do well in moist, well-drained soil and, especially for the first couple of years, require frequent watering. Mulch well. When planting in groupings, allow ample space among plants for spread and adequate air flow.

If your soil isn't great, late winter or spring feeding may be necessary. Otherwise, good soil should be enough to feed your hydrangeas.

To Prune or Not to Prune? By far, the most confusing topic for new gardeners is the "new wood, old wood" reference to pruning flowering shrubs. Hydrangeas are no exception. Simply put, new wood is the current season's growth and old wood is the previous season's growth. And, adding to the complication, not all hydrangeas require the same pruning routine. But, never fear...the process is easy once you identify which hydrangea you have!

If a shrub "blooms on old wood", that means it sets blooms at the end of the growing season. So, if you came along in spring and pruned.....oops! There went the blooms. But, on the same plant, if you pruned it to shape just after it flowered, (but, say, not beyond August or so), this gives it time to set blooms for the next season. Simply leave it alone until it blooms again the following season. That's why sometimes we hear about harsh winters having an effect on "old wood" bloomers - because the cold killed the buds they'd set before winter.

“New wood” bloomers do exactly that - they bloom on new growth produced in the current season. Pruning these hydrangeas correctly in the winter or spring will not affect blooming. Additionally, new growth can emerge either from the crown or on previous year’s stems, so leaving a few woodies to support the weight of large flowers is highly recommended.

See: [OSU - Oklahoma Gardening: Pruning Hydrangeas](#)

What Type of Hydrangea Do You Have? Knowing which type of hydrangea you have (or want) will go far in understanding the care requirements for what will quickly become one of your favorite plants. The varieties listed here are Proven Winners® selections, but there are others as well that you may discover.

- ❖ **Hydrangea Arborescens: “Smooth” or Native Hydrangea**
 - Varieties: Annabelle or INCREDIBALL®
 - Blooms on new wood
 - Prune old wood a couple inches from the ground in winter or spring

- ❖ **Hydrangea Paniculata: Panicle Hydrangea (a.k.a. “Peegee”, Paniculata Grandiflora)**
 - Varieties: ‘Limelight’, PINKYWINKY®
 - Blooms on new wood
 - Leave some supportive older woody stems to support weight of heavy flower heads

- ❖ **Hydrangea Macrophylla: Bigleaf Hydrangea (Mophead, Lacecap flower forms)**
 - Varieties: ABRACADABRA®, LET’S DANCE®
 - White, pink/blue (pink or blue depending on soil acidity and soil aluminum content)

- Blooms on old wood, some cultivars will bloom on old and new wood (e.g. ENDLESS SUMMER®)
- Prune in summer after blooming, prune only dead wood in spring

❖ Hydrangea Quercifolia: Oakleaf Hydrangea

- Varieties: GATSBY®
- Blooms on old wood
- Prune in summer after blooming, prune only dead wood in spring

❖ Hydrangea Petiolaris: Climbing Hydrangea

- Blooms on old wood
- Prune in summer after blooming, prune only dead wood in spring

Hydrangea Serrata: Mountain Hydrangea

- Varieties: TUFF STUFF®
- Blooms on old wood
- Prune in summer after blooming, prune only dead wood in spring

Color Change: Changing the color of your bigleaf hydrangea from pink to blue (or vice versa) depends on the pH of the soil and the presence and absorption of aluminum ions. Not all bigleaf hydrangeas can alter color. White flowers remain white and some cultivars, like H. Macrophylla, CITYLINE®, cannot change.

Results from amendments do not happen overnight. This should only be attempted after a soil test and on mature, healthy plants. Here's a great article on how to control flower color in H. Macrophylla: [Farmer's Almanac - How to Change the Color of Hydrangeas.](#)

Was it ever an intimidating undertaking to cultivate one of these amazing plants in your garden? Perhaps you thought these beauties only bloomed for seasoned gardeners and/or in other climates. Well, surprisingly enough, hydrangeas are not difficult to maintain in Oklahoma with the right location, light, soil, water and care. So, consider inviting one into your garden (and prune wisely)!

Resources:

[Proven Winners Hydrangea Troubleshooting Chart](#)

[HLA-6439](#) Selecting Shrubs for the Landscape

[Farmer's Almanac - How to Change the Color of Hydrangeas](#)

[OSU - Oklahoma Gardening Video: Pruning Hydrangeas](#)