

HYDRANGEAS

QUESTION: I would love to plant hydrangeas, but I feel intimidated about caring for them. Are they easy for beginning gardeners?

ANSWER: Don't be intimidated! Hydrangeas are one of the most beautiful shrubs we can plant in the Northwest.

It is hard to think of another common genus with such a variety of bloom colors (blue, pink, green, white, lavender) and shapes (globe, lace-cap, conical) on plants that can be compact enough to plant in a container, all the way up to large, towering shrubs. There are many new varieties that have been introduced in the past several years – even some that rebloom in the summer.

Most will give you a long bloom time and some will have beautiful fall color. Do a little research and plan on adding one or more of these plants to your garden this fall.

Understanding the basic types of hydrangeas will give you the information you need to find the best plant for your site, as well as provide the care it needs. Most of us think of the big blue “mophead” style hydrangea (the ones your grandmother tried to manipulate to turn pink or blue by acidifying or neutralizing the soil) when we think of this plant. However, there are so many others that are worthy of consideration.

Although most people think of



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hydrangeas as a shade-loving plant, most need at least four hours of sunlight per day – some can take full sun. They are water-loving plants but will not tolerate soggy conditions.

A lot of questions about hydrangeas involve blooming problems: “why isn't my hydrangea blooming?” The answer to this question often lies in how or when the plant was pruned. The key to hydrangea care is knowing what type of hydrangea you have in your garden.

Here are the most common types of hydrangeas:

■ *Hydrangea macrophylla*: This is the standard big-leaf, or mophead hydrangea, with the globular or lace-cap style blooms. This blooms on old wood. The so-called ever-blooming hydrangeas fall into this group, but see below for pruning considerations.

■ *Hydrangea arborescens*: Smooth hydrangea, also known as Annabelle hydrangea. This has very large globular, usually white flowers and blooms on new wood.

■ *Hydrangea paniculata*: Panicle or

peegee hydrangea has cone-shaped flowers on large shrubs. Some varieties have flowers that tend to change color as the season changes, giving beautiful fall color. This type is more tolerant of heat and sun and blooms on new wood.

■ *Hydrangea quercifolia* or oak-leaf hydrangea: Flowers are usually creamy white on large shrubs with foliage resembling oak-leaves. This variety tolerates more sun than some of the big-leaf types. It is later blooming, but provides fall interest and blooms on old wood.

■ *Hydrangea petiolaris*: Climbing hydrangea has clinging vines, and best for narrow, shady areas – preferring a north or east exposure. White, lace-cap style blooms, blooming on old wood.

■ *Hydrangea serrata* or Mountain hydrangea: Lace-cap flowers that bloom a little later than in the summer, making them more reliable in areas with colder spring weather. This type blooms on old wood.

Did you notice the comments about blooming on old or new wood? This refers to the buds being set on growth from the year before or buds on growth from the current season. Let's just say your spouse (hypothetically) went around your yard and cut back all your shrubs in late winter.

If that included a mop-head hydrangea, you would not have any blooms that summer (enjoy the

attractive foliage).

Avoid pruning any of the hydrangeas that bloom on old wood. You can dead-head old blooms if you cut to just above the first set of leaves below the bloom. Of course, if you need to prune to maintain size you can do that, realizing you are sacrificing blooms for the next season. Try to do any of that in late summer, before the buds start setting for next year.

The varieties that bloom on new wood should be pruned in late winter while still dormant. The re-blooming hydrangeas (like variety Endless Summer) bloom on both old and new wood and can be dead-headed during the summer and pruned in late summer before buds are setting for next year.

If you have hydrangeas in your yard that you need help identifying, call the Master Gardener Plant Clinic number at the end of this article.

Hydrangeas are a beautiful addition to your garden. The only hard part will be deciding what variety you want.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.

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