

# Prudent pruning

*The key to trimming hydrangeas is knowing which variety you have*

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**Q**uestion: I have some hydrangeas in my yard but have never seen them bloom, even though I prune them every year. What am I doing wrong?

**Answer:** First of all, you need to determine what kind of hydrangea you have. Those that bloom on old wood from last year's growth bloom in early spring. The most common of the hydrangeas – “mop head,” “lace cap” or “big leaf” (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) – are examples of this. So if you were to cut them down during the winter, you would be eliminating all the flower buds. It's best with this type of hydrangea to snip off the spent blooms in the fall, just above the new forming buds.

Oak leaf hydrangeas bloom in July or August and should be pruned immediately after flowering. These have dramatic,

white-blooming blossoms in a conical shape, their leaves turning red in the fall, and have cinnamon-colored, peeling bark that adds year-round interest to your landscape.

Smooth hydrangeas (*H. arborescens*) and Pee Gee hydrangeas (*H. paniculata*) bloom on new wood of the current season. Smooth hydrangeas can be cut back hard in early spring, cutting back all stems to about 12 inches from the soil line. Some well-known cultivars are “Annabelle” and “Grandiflora.” The Pee Gee hydrangea is the largest of the hydrangeas that puts forth large, panicle-shaped blooms and doesn't require much pruning at all. Just remove spent flowers and any broken stems. They will reach a height of 25 feet, so if size is a problem, you can hard prune them down to 12 inches occasionally to encourage long stems for fresh or dried flowers.



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If you aren't certain what type of hydrangea you have, a safe rule of thumb for all types is: No pruning is better than the wrong type of pruning.

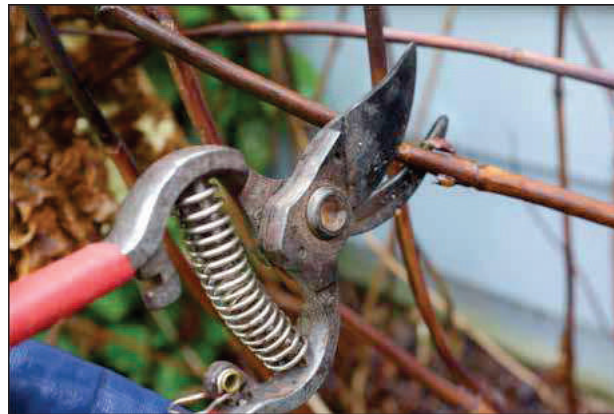


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You can remove old dried flower heads safely anytime by cutting them to just above the next set of buds.

If you aren't certain what type of hydrangea you have, a safe rule of thumb for all types is: No pruning is better than the wrong type of pruning. For all types of hydrangeas, keep in mind these simple pruning procedures:

■ **Dead or winter-killed wood** – Remove all dead branches in the spring before or when you see the buds opening. You can test to see if the branch is dead by gently scraping the bark with a knife. If it doesn't reveal green underneath, it is dead and

needs to be removed. Cut the dead branch or stem down to the next living branch or possibly all the way to the soil line.

■ **Rejuvenation** – To stimulate new growth, manage size and produce more vigorous blooms, remove dead or very old stems in early spring by cutting them down to the base of the plant.

Try not to remove more than one-third of the branches.

■ **Dead-heading flowers** – You can remove old dried flower heads safely anytime by cutting them to just above the next set of buds. Some gardeners like to leave the brown blooms on the plant into early spring to add interest to their landscape.

If your hydrangeas become overgrown and need to be cut back, hard renewal pruning may be needed and entails cutting all of the branches to the ground. Of course, this eliminates all blossoms for that year, but you will see much more blossoms the following year.

*Do you have a gardening question? Please email, call, or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu), 541-672-4461, or 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.*