

HOW TO PRUNE HYDRANGEA



Illinois Extension

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

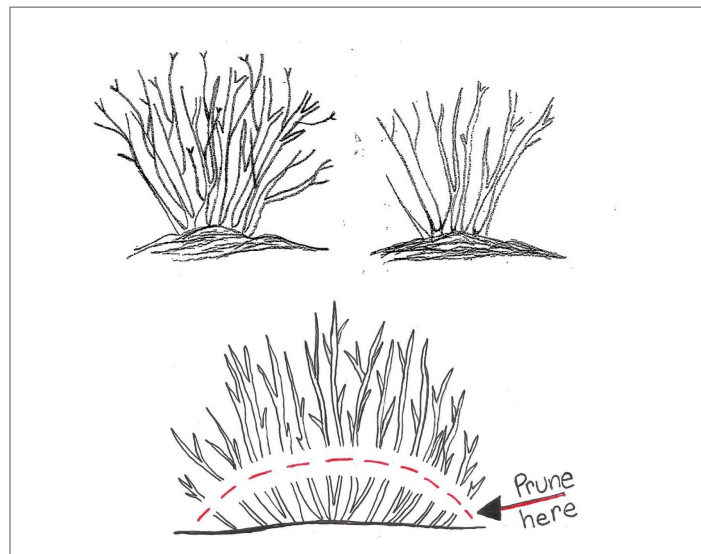
Hydrangea

Beloved by gardeners and landscapers for their bigger-than-life ornamental appeal, hydrangeas have what horticulturists call multi-season interest, maintaining beauty through spring, summer, and fall.

Pruning hydrangeas will keep plants healthy and increase the floral display. However, pruning timing is crucial and depends on the species of hydrangea.

New wood: Hydrangeas that bloom on new wood should be pruned in late winter to early spring, before new growth occurs.

Old wood: Hydrangeas that bloom on old wood should be pruned following their summer flower display.



Top: Renewal pruning. Bottom: Rejuvenation pruning.

TWO PRUNING OPTIONS

When pruning shrubs, gardeners can do a renewal pruning or a rejuvenation pruning.

Renewal pruning is often called thinning, and is the ideal method for multi-stemmed shrubs. Every year, remove one third to half of the older stems, and all dead stems. The youngest stems are the most vigorous and eventually will produce the best flowers. Cut the old, leave the young. An added benefit is that the older ones tend to be in the middle of the plant, which opens the plant to more light and airflow, meaning less disease and more vigorous growth. To reduce height, head back by cutting branches to a lateral bud. Lateral buds grow from a node along the side of a branch, as opposed to the tip of the branch.

Rejuvenation pruning removes all stems on the shrub to a few inches above the ground during late winter to early spring. This is recommended for overgrown or neglected shrubs. This method will rejuvenate the plant and new shoots will provide more blooms.

Types of Hydrangea

PANICLED HYDRANGEA

Hydrangea paniculata, also known as panicled hydrangea, includes industry favorites like 'Limelight', Pinky Winky®, Quick Fire®, and 'Tardiva.' These are some of the most winter-hardy hydrangeas, and they are tolerant of urban . Native to Japan, these shrubs grow 6 to 10 feet high depending on cultivar, and bloom early to mid-summer. Panicled hydrangea has a long fragrant floral display beginning in June and last into September. The fall color is usually green with dappled yellow or red. They bloom on new wood and should be pruned in late winter or early spring.



Larger flowers can be produced by an annual thinning the plant to five to 10 primary canes. They can be rejuvenated by cutting all the way to the ground every few years.





SPECIES	Panicked Hydrangea	Oak Leaf Hydrangea	Smooth Hydrangea	Big Leaf Hydrangea
WHEN TO PRUNE	Late Winter or Early Spring	After Flowering	Late Winter or Early Spring	After Flowering

OAK LEAF HYDRANGEA

Hydrangea quercifolia, also known as oak leaf hydrangea, grows about 6-feet tall and 6-feet wide in an upright, broad rounded shape. Native to the United States, this shrub has large cone-shaped blooms that add color starting in May. The blooms last to the end of summer, when they have transformed from white, to purplish pink, to brown. It boasts large dark green leaves that turn rusty red in the fall and are reminiscent of oak leaves. Rough brown bark covers the stem. This plant blooms on old wood, meaning pruning must be done after flowering in late summer.



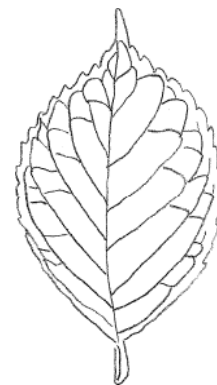
SMOOTH HYDRANGEA

Hydrangea arborescens are known as smooth hydrangea. It is native to Illinois. The most commonly planted cultivar is 'Annabelle.' It usually has large heart-shaped leaves, and equally massive summer flowers. The colors transition from green to white to brown. In nature, this plant is loose and wild-looking, but in a cultivated setting where additional water and fertilizers are provided, it makes a nice clump-forming shrub. Flowers appear in June, and a second floral display comes in August if spent flowers are removed. These plants respond well to rejuvenation pruning. Remove the outer canes in late winter.



BIG LEAF HYDRANGEA

Hydrangea macrophylla is known as big leaf hydrangea. This hydrangea has a rounded shape and asserts pink blooms in basic soil or blue blooms in acidic soils. They are a litmus tests for soil pH.



Aluminum causes the flowers to turn blue; however, an elevated pH can lock up the aluminum particles in the soil, making it unavailable to the plant. Lowering the pH by applying aluminum sulfate or sulfur can turn your hydrangeas blue. Sulfur is a safer bet when trying to lower pH as sulfur reduces the chance of aluminum toxicity that can occur from using aluminum sulfate. An up-to-date soil test before adjusting your soil's chemical composition saves money and headaches.

If consistent moisture is not being applied, should be grown in partial shade. There are two forms of big leaf hydrangea: lace caps or mopheads. Some of the most common cultivars are Endless Summer®, 'Nikko blue,' and Twist and Shout®. Prune after flowering. It is best to give them somewhat of a sheltered location. Sometimes even the best pruning practices can still leave you without blooms, as harsh Illinois winters can destroy stems and buds.

MORE INFORMATION

Manual of Woody Landscape Plants; Their Identification Ornamental Characteristics, Culture, Propagation and Uses. Michael Dirr.

University of Illinois Extension: [Selecting Shrubs for your Home](#)



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