

HYDRANGEAS IN THE SOUTHERN LANDSCAPE

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Title of Presentation: Hydrangeas in the Southern Landscape

Learning Objectives: 1) The selection of species for specific uses, 2) Cultural and pruning needs of the different species, 3) Suggestions of cultivars and realistic expectations of their performance, and 4) How hydrangeas add to the broader landscape.

Hydrangea quercifolia

Our native Oakleaf hydrangeas are valued for large lobed dark-green foliage and extravagant fragrant white blooms. Flowers age pink to dark rose and the fall foliage can be deep burgundy red.

Size varies from 3'-4' to 10'-12'. All are wider than tall. Make your selections with mature size in mind to give these magnificent plants their due.

Some selections:

'Alice', 'Harmony', 'Snowflake', 'Snow Queen', etc. grow 8' to 12' tall & wide.

'Pee Wee' to 5', 'Munchkin' only to 3' and 'Ruby Slippers' to 3 ½'.

Bloom: Mid to late May (in the metro Atlanta area).

Pruning: Give oakleaf hydrangeas the space they need. Except for shaping, creating structure and deadheading, pruning is not necessary. Flowering wood is formed during the growing season before the current year's bloom. Prune if necessary after blooming.

Culture: These are tough long-lived garden companions. Drainage is essential. They require moist soils and excellent drainage. Plant high. Mulch but do not pile mulch at the base of the stems. Oakleaf hydrangeas can be planted in full sun (with additional irrigation) or in shade and still bloom reliably. Part shade is best in the south. More bloom and brilliant fall colors are produced with more sun than shade. Heavy flower headed selections like 'Harmony' and 'Snowflake' benefit from several hours of sun. It helps the wood ripen (become more woody) making better able to hold the bloom up.

Hydrangea arborescens

4-5' x 5'. Guaranteed to bloom. A good addition to any planting. Native to eastern North America, the woodland form is a lacecap with wide, flat heads of creamy white fertile flowers with very few or no sterile white flowers along the outer edge of the inflorescence. The discovery of mostly sterile forms of *H. arborescens* such as 'Annabelle' and 'Grandiflora', brought our wild hydrangea to popularity. Blooms emerge a soft pale green, become white, and age first to green and then to a tawny parchment brown.

Bloom: June, with peak usually mid-June.

Pruning: Prune at the end of winter or beginning of spring. Since arborescens bloom on new wood, it is possible to cut them back to about 1' above the ground. This produces large blooms that tend to bow the heavy-headed stems, particularly when it rains. Lighter pruning results in numerous smaller blooms on a tidier shrub. Prune to create a strong structure.

Culture: The arborescens prefer rich, moist, well-draining soil and partial shade. They will not tolerate poor drainage. Take care to not plant too deeply. They want bright shade to half day sun. The colder (farther north) the planting site, the more sun they can take.

Annabelle, Incrediball and Grandiflora are white mopheads.

Invincible Spirit II is a pink mophead.

Haas Halo is a white lacecap.

Hydrangea paniculata

The sun-loving Hydrangea paniculatas are perfect for mixed borders, showing well with other shrubs, tall perennials, acting as support for clematis and other modest vines or creating pools of shade at their ankles for pockets of shade lovers.

Bloom: The large fragrant white cone-shaped inflorescences are produced in mid to late summer for two months and age with different degrees of rose to wine-pink coloration.

Full Sun to a bit of shade. Shade in the late afternoon prolongs bloom attractiveness. Good garden conditions. Soil that drains. Fertilize early March.

Prune: late winter, early spring. Hard pruning can maintain a 5'-6' shrub, or they can be limbed up into small multi-stemmed trees. Rather than whacking H. paniculate to stubs, prune to improve and shape plant structure. Pruning can also be used to delay or stagger bloom times.

Culture: The panicle hydrangeas are tolerant of most soils as long as there is reasonable drainage. Although drought tolerant when established, without adequate moisture in summer they can look a bit bedraggled. Full sun makes for more floriferous displays, but in the South some shade in the late afternoon extends the attractiveness of aging blooms. High shade is acceptable but expect less extravagant floral displays. Selections grow 4' to 12'.

12'+/- Limelight, Phantom, Florabunda

6'+ White Diamonds, Silver Dollar

5' and smaller Little Lime, Bobo, Bombshell, Baby Lace

Hydrangea macrophylla / Mopheads and Lacecaps

Although there are more than 500 cultivars of Hydrangea macrophylla, there are but two main types – the hortensias (or mopheads) with their large rounded heads of mostly sterile flowers, and the lacecaps, with their flattened heads of tiny, fertile flowers ringed with larger sterile ray flowers. (In actuality, the line blurs as there are flattened mopheads

as well as lacecaps with sterile florets poking up from the fertile center.) The effect of the mopheads, which range in color from white through all the shades of pink and lilac to a deep, true blue (or even purple), is of strong bold impact in the garden. Some of the pastel lacecaps, on the other hand, with their more refined appearance, are easier to place and are especially effective in more naturalistic plantings. **Zones 6-9.**

Culture: For all the bigleaf hydrangeas, the cultural requirements are much the same. Because the parents of most garden cultivars were native to coastal areas of central Japan, the macrophyllas are best acclimated to a temperate climate without extremes of temperature. If you don't enjoy the blessings of a maritime climate, the best solution is to try to provide your bigleaf hydrangeas with a sheltered spot and protection from both winter winds and the intense afternoon sun of summer. Although all cultivars are happiest with midday shade, some direct morning or late afternoon sun can be a benefit. Of course, bright dappled woodland shade is ideal. Soil enriched with ample organic material, adequate irrigation when the weather is dry and a 3" layer of organic mulch (taking care not to lay the mulch too close to the stems of the plant) will provide good growing conditions.

Pruning: Pruning is always a matter of concern for gardeners and in the case of the macrophyllas too little is preferable to too much. The best way to prune is to thin older plants (4+ years) by cutting out a portion (say, one-third) of the old woody canes to the base and any dead wood in late winter before the new buds begin to swell. Do not prune by shortening stems, except to remove old flowerheads, as you are likely to cut off your flower buds. We think it is best to leave the dried heads of old blooms on the plant until winter's end to help protect new flower buds. When danger of late frost is past, carefully dead-head old blooms by cutting off just above the first pair of new buds. A young plant may be cut back some after blooming in June/July to enhance its structure or fullness. This should not harm next year's bloom. Likewise, if you need to rejuvenate an overgrown, tired, or non-blooming older macrophylla, you should do this corrective pruning, shaping and thinning smack in the middle of mid-summer for the same reason: your shrub will have the maximum time to produce new branches (with next year's flower wood) and harden off before the first fall freezes.

Hydrangea serrata

Similar to the macrophyllas in many ways, the serratas are generally less robust in habit though actually hardier. They are more reliable bloomers as their flower buds are less susceptible to late frosts. Their handsome leaves are often narrower than the macrophyllas, usually show a touch of red and color well in the fall. Their blooms are particularly enchanting as they age; several of the cultivars change dramatically in color through their bloom season. Best late season color in both foliage and aging flowers is produced in a fairly sunny spot, but they prefer more shade in the south, especially out of a hot, western exposure. Prune as for *Hydrangea macrophylla* after they finish blooming. **Zones 5 – 8.**

Vines

Hydrangea anomala ssp. *petiolaris* is the familiar climbing hydrangea, and the only climber of the genus *Hydrangea* that we can grow in most parts of U.S. There are other vines commonly referred to as "climbing hydrangeas" which will grow in the Southeast. These are the *Schizophramas*, both *hydrangeoides*/Japanese Climbing Hydrangea and *integrifolium*/Chinese Climbing Hydrangea. There is also a native vine that is referred to as a hydrangea, *Decumaria barbara*/Woodvamp or Native Hydrangea.

All of the climbers are slow to establish. Give them time and room. As a group they prefer partial shade and good soil with adequate moisture. They climb by holdfasts, attaching to trees, walls and fences. They are all slow to bloom, and can take several years before the first bloom. Flowering is promoted if climbing is frustrated. Blooms are seen sooner when planted on a short wall or fence rather than a 60' tree. Or you can choose to keep it at a height that you are able to maintain. Whack it back in late spring (or after it blooms) to convince it that it can go no higher and to push growth horizontally. All have white bloom but one and all are lace caps but our native Woodvamp which has 2" spheres of honey scented fertile flowers.

Fertilize same as all other hydrangeas. Prune after bloom, or bloom time, in spring.

Some Troubles (excluding deer, rabbit, slugs, voles, destructive pruning, heartbreak, falling branches, etc.)

Borers Related to ambrosia beetle. Hard to get rid of. Cut to ground stems with borers. Remove foliage and mulch under infested shrubs. Burn or bag and remove. Ozzie Johnson has drenched with a Bayer systemic. Unfortunately the main ingredient is a nicotinoid which is implicated in honeybee die off. He suggested that if bright succulent spring growth has stems which look wilted in the morning that the borers are probably present. We have found evidence of borers only in old wood.

Mildew Found mostly on *macrophyllas* and *serratas* that do not get enough direct sunlight, and in areas with high humidity. Will not kill plant. Remove fallen foliage and apply clean mulch.

Leaf spots Usually appears in late summer and early fall on plants receiving too much direct sun. High humidity and overhead watering are factors. Not fatal. Again, clean cultivation is helpful.

Rust Mostly found on *H. arborescens* at end of the growing season.

Mites Usually show up in hot dry situations (July and August). Hard to get rid of as they multiply copiously and rapidly. They live on the underside of leaves so whatever method you choose, high pressure water, light oil, insecticidal soap must be directed there, not on the upper surfaces. Must be applied weekly and in rotation. Adequate watering is the best preventative.

Our website is www.hydrangea.com.

We are always open to the public by appointment (email or call, 770-463-2400) and on our OPEN DAYS. Check the website for dates and times.

A comment on pruning: We who prune in public set the example of what is considered correct. Get a good book, mentor or guide. Please.