

## Hydrangeas: Demystified!<sup>1</sup>

The popularity of hydrangeas and availability of new cultivars on the market has changed the way we think about hydrangeas. In general, these are not your grandma's hydrangeas! Before we begin, take time to think about these questions and make an effort to answer the questions. This will help you gain a better idea of the many hydrangeas you can use in the landscape.

1. How many main types of hydrangeas do you think are available on the market?
2. Are florist type blooms available on any types other than macrophylla types?
3. Are there any hydrangeas that you can cut to the ground each fall?
4. Are lacecaps a type of hydrangea, or a type of flower?
5. Do hydrangeas take more sun, or more shade?
6. Do all hydrangeas require a lot of water?
7. Are all hydrangeas heavy feeders?



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# Hydrangeas: Demystified! - ANSWERS

The popularity of hydrangeas and availability of new cultivars on the market has changed the way we think about hydrangeas. In general, these are not your grandma's hydrangeas! Before we begin, take time to think about these questions and make an effort to answer the questions. This will help you gain a better idea of the many hydrangeas you can use in the landscape.

1. How many main types of hydrangeas do you think are available on the market?

A – There are five main types. Many consumers are familiar with the macrophylla/serrata types (florist type hydrangeas). These are the blue/pink types that can change their color based on soil pH. They are the most difficult to grow, depending on your zone and growing conditions. All other hydrangeas are white, but also have lime green, pink, red and even purple tones.

2. Are florist type blooms available on any types other than macrophylla types?

A - YES! These are the large flowers that are full of petals – to the point that you can't see through the bloom. Some examples include:

Smooth – *H. arborescens* 'Hayes Starburst,' 'Invincibelle® Ruby' & others

Oakleaf – *H. quercifolia* 'Gatsby Moon®'

Panicle – *H. paniculata* 'Little Lime,' 'Bobo,' and many more. Note: These tend to be more pyramidal than rounded.

3. Are there any hydrangeas that you can cut to the ground each fall?

A – YES! All of the smooth hydrangeas *H. arborescens* can be cut to the ground in the fall. They will return each spring and bloom by early June in zone 5. Technically, you can cut *H. macrophylla* down to the ground and get blooms the next season – but only if it blooms on old and new wood. This is generally not recommended, though.

Refer to the chart and factsheet for more information on pruning.

4. Are lacecaps a type of hydrangea, or a type of flower?

A – The term lacecap refers to the type of flower, not the type of hydrangea. Although the term lacecap is used to describe the plant at times, it actually refers to the type of flower. Lacecap type flowers generally have petals around the outside of the flower head with complete (fertile) flowers lacking petals in the center. Mophead flowers are generally made up of a full flower head of infertile flowers with petals.

5. Do hydrangeas take more sun, or more shade?

A – In general, all hydrangeas are best suited for morning sun and afternoon shade. The climbing hydrangea and panicle hydrangeas can take the most sun. BUT – panicle hydrangeas that get afternoon shade will generally show faded colors that are deeper and that last for a longer period of time. Oakleaf hydrangea flowers that have afternoon sun will have flowers that fade to brown just a few weeks after blooming.

6. Do all hydrangeas require a lot of water?

A – No. *H. macrophylla* will mophead type flowers generally have the highest water needs, followed by other hydrangeas that have mophead type blooms. Hydrangeas with lacecap type flowers can withstand more sun than those with mophead type blooms.

7. Are all hydrangeas heavy feeders?

A – No. *H. macrophylla* tends to have a higher requirement for fertilizer, but does not need fertilized weekly like annual plants. Using too much nitrogen fertilizer on these plants will result in reduced or limited blooms.

# Hydrangea Kit for Activities and Demonstration

Kit includes:

1. Dried blooms from each type of hydrangea.
2. Fresh leaves for use during the growing season. Dried, pressed leaves for out of season programs.
3. Watering items: soaker hose, drip take, tuna can for 1" of water, watering timer.
4. Fertilizer items: in sealed bags, examples of different types of fertilizer, with copies of labels attached to the bags.

## Activities for Presentations

**Blooms/Leaves** - When teaching the class, place the blooms and/or leaves on a table in the front of the room. Place them in the same order as the chart from the participant's perspective. Use blooms to show the difference types/sizes of blooms for each type of hydrangea during that part of the presentation. Explain lacecap v. mophead type flowers on each type.

**Watering Items** – Use to explain how to water in the best manner possible – at the root zone in a slow manner where water can be taken up by the roots. Explain using watering timers and hoses/tapes to provide a minimum of 1" of water per week.

**Fertilizer Items** – Use to explain fertilization of hydrangeas. In general, most hydrangeas do not need fertilizer if not suggested based on a soil test. *H. macrophylla* will benefit from fertilization based on label directions about once per month during the season. If the plant gets damaged by frost, fertilization will help the plant in early spring. Over fertilization with nitrogen fertilizer will reduce blooms on these plants.

Reviewing the references below will help you prepare for a presentation and develop additional talking points and activities for your program.

### References:

1. Fulcher, A., J. Derr, W. Klingeman, C. Marble, J. Neal, A. Windham, and G. Weaver. 2017. Hydrangea—Hydrangea spp., Chapter 1 in Chappell, M., G.W. Knox, and G. Fernandez, (eds.), IPM for Shrubs in Southeastern U.S. Nursery Production: Volume II. 44p. [https://wiki.bugwood.org/IPM\\_Shrub\\_Book\\_II](https://wiki.bugwood.org/IPM_Shrub_Book_II)
2. Dirr, Michael. 2004. Hydrangeas for American Gardens. Timber Press, Portland, OR. 236p.
3. Oregon State University. 2015. Landscape Plants: Images, Identification, and Information. Volume 2. <https://oregonstate.edu/dept/ldplants/2plants.htm>
4. Penn State University Extension. 2017. Hydrangea Diseases. <http://extension.psu.edu/pests/plant-diseases/all-fact-sheets/hydrangea-diseases>
5. United States Department of Agriculture. 2012. USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. <http://planthardiness.ars.usda.gov/PHZMWeb/>