



HOW TO HAVE FABULOUS HYDRANGEAS

What Hydrangeas want:

All Hydrangeas do best in consistently moist soil. Automatic irrigation systems take all the worry out, but low-tech soaker hoses paired with a battery-operated timer works very well too. Watering deeply enough by hand is not generally effective...A 2" layer of mulch goes a long way in retaining moisture, to keep roots cool, and build your soil. Mulch really 'finishes' a bed too. Win, Win, Win!

When planting your Hydrangea, add amendments such as composted manure or peat moss to help build the organic matter and retain moisture. Plant all shrubs in a generously created hole, backfill with amended soil, but leave the root ball an inch or two deeper than surrounding surface. This creates a 'well' that facilitates extra hand watering until shrub is rooted in and established.

Be sure to pick the right place for your Hydrangea! Each 'family' listed below has their favored light conditions and exposure to winter winds. Given the correct placement, your Hydrangea will provide years of beauty and be easy to care for.

Hydrangea Families

Arborescens family – So called 'Smooth Hydrangeas'

These are identified by their large ball shaped blooms and having white, fuzzy undersides to their leaves. Native to the Eastern USA, they are very hardy. They can live in full sun (in the North!) down to medium (not dark) shade. 'Annabelle' is the oldest cultivar, with a popular improved variety named 'Incrediball' known for huge white blooms and strong stems. Several new cultivars are available now with shades of pink, along with smaller sizes. This variety blooms on new growth. **Prune these in spring** by cutting the entire shrub down to 6-10" You can remove aged blooms in the fall if that is your preference.

Macrophylla family – 'Bigleaf Hydrangeas'

This groups' bloom color is determined by the pH of the soil they are grown in (more on this later). This family blooms **first** on last year's growth = 'old wood', then again late in the year on this year's growth = 'new wood'. This family is the tenderest of the Hydrangeas for our zone; Care must be taken here in the North to plant in protected areas to avoid winter kill of flower buds. Pruning should **only be done in later spring** when leaves begin to show where the branch is alive. Prune above last bud swell all over shrub. Pruning spent blossoms in the fall is fine. Best grown in dappled shade.

Paniculata family – 'Panicle Hydrangea'

The name speaks to their large cone shaped blossoms. These shrubs really need sun to thrive (6 hours is a minimum) Wide variety of sizes and bloom colors make this type versatile! This type blooms on 'new wood', so **prune in the spring** for shape first (you can cut back quite hard if desired), then remove thin twiggy growth that can't support blossoms. It is fine to deadhead blossoms in the fall if desired.

How to feed:

Hydrangeas are fairly heavy feeders. We feed with a slow-release granular food that provides slow-release balanced nutrients. Our favorite product is Espoma Holly-tone. Apply 3 times each season; spring, mid-summer, and September. If yellowing occurs in leaves of plants, additional iron is required. Lower the pH of the soil to correct this by top dressing with Sulphur in the spring and fall. Follow product label for amounts.

Flower Color...

I know everyone desires beautiful blue blossoms! Michigan is a limestone peninsula, and we have predominately hard water (think sweet). These factors all push the soil pH towards alkaline, making blooms pink...so I say 'embrace' Pink!

If you do want blue...work to lower the soil pH around your hydrangeas by adding Sulphur to the soil surface as described earlier and using Aluminum Sulfate per package directions each spring. We apply 2-3 doses before bud swell around each shrub's dripline. Alternately, you can dissolve the Aluminum Sulfate in water and soak in around each shrub. Expect this to be a slow process. It may take a few seasons to see results. It's much easier to attain blue Hydrangeas if they're grown in large containers. REMEMBER, this only applies to the 'Bigleaf' or Macrophylla family.

That's it! Enjoy your fabulous Hydrangeas from Polly's Planting & Plucking.