

outdoors PLANTINGS



Hydrangeas

Hydrangea queries are popular for the Garden Doctor at BHG.com/gardenquestions. Here are answers to the most common questions.

by SUSAN APPELEGET HURST

Q: I fell in love with those heavenly blue hydrangeas, but mine have turned a muddy violet. Can I make them blue again?

If you planted a hydrangea with blue—or pink—flowers, it is one of the bigleaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), which depend on soil pH to determine those hues. A low pH (around 5.2–5.5) is an acid soil, and it brings on the blue tones. As pH moves up from 5.5 toward 6, blooms turn pale blue or violet hues. Soil pH above 6 encourages bigleaf hydrangeas to produce pink tones. To bring the blue back, lower the soil pH at planting time by mixing the soil 50/50 with sphagnum peat moss. After planting, make an annual application of aluminum sulfate to the soil around the plant. Follow package directions carefully. It may take a season or two, but the blue blooms should return.

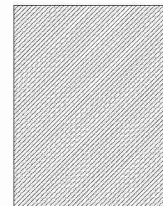


PHOTO: WILLIAM STITES

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Q: My hydrangea is in a moist spot, but the leaves are wilting and turning brown. What's up?

Hydrangeas like moist, but not soggy soil. Heavy clay soil can be a problem as well. Move your hydrangea to a better-drained location. Or improve the clay soil by mixing in a generous amount of compost and replant the hydrangea in the same spot.

Q: Are those reblooming hydrangeas for real?

The new reblooming bigleaf types, such as 'Endless Summer', do bloom repeatedly all summer in the right conditions. They need 4 hours or more of direct sun, protection from late-spring frost in Zones 4-5, and an annual dose of fertilizer with balanced numbers, such as 10-10-10.

Q: My hydrangea has lots of green leaves but very few flowers. Why won't it bloom?

To bring out the blooms ...

Choose a hardy plant. The bigleaf types, such as mopheads and lacecaps (*H. macrophylla*), bloom best in Zones 6-9. In colder Zones 4-8, plant *H. arborescens* cultivars such as 'Annabelle', or try *H. paniculata* 'PeeGee', above, or 'Tardiva'.

Give it some sun. Most hydrangeas need at least four hours of direct sun to produce flowers. In the South, protect them from hot afternoon sun. Plant oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*) in partially shaded Zones 5-8 gardens.

Feed it properly. Hydrangeas need a fertilizer labeled just for flowering trees and shrubs.



Choose the best hydrangea for your garden at BH&G.com/hydrangeatips



PHOTOS: (PEEGEE) TREE HYDRANGEA, WHITE HYDRANGEA; CHIPPER-HATTER; (ENDLESS SUMMER) HYDRANGEA; RICK TAYLOR

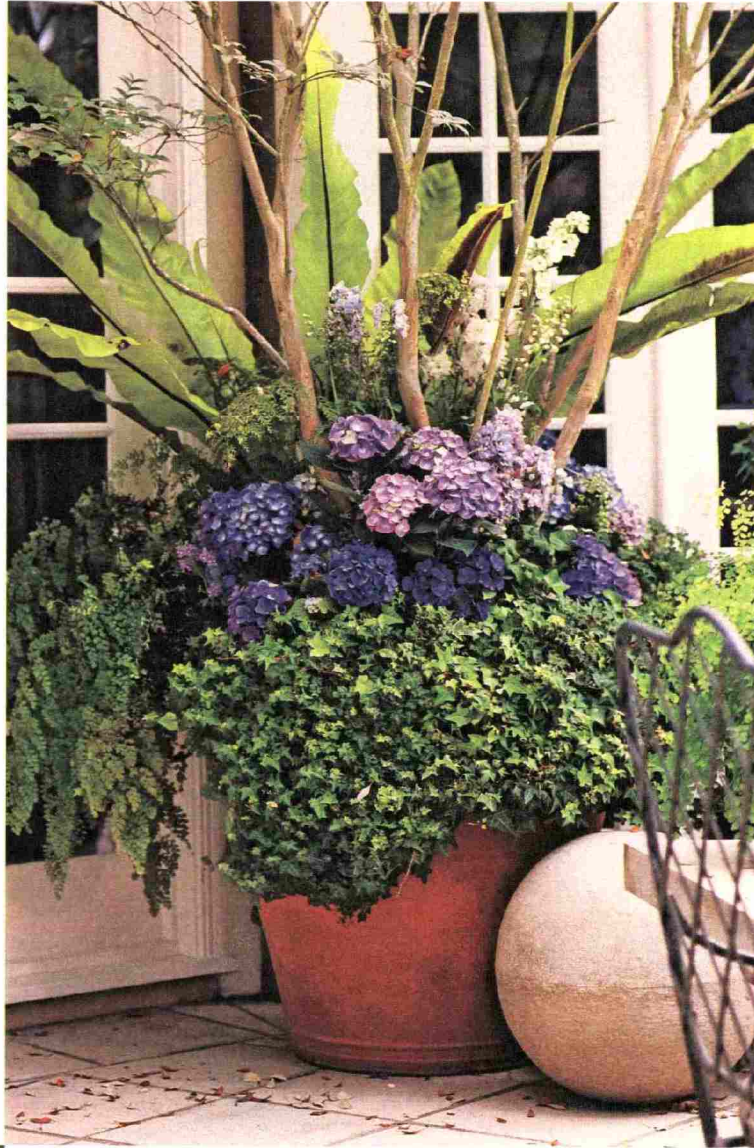
Q: I pruned my lacecap hydrangea last fall, and there were no blooms this summer. Was it because of the pruning?

Lacecape, below, and mophead hydrangeas are *H. macrophylla*, which produce flower buds in fall. Prune this type of hydrangea in July so you don't cut off next year's buds.



Q: What types of hydrangeas look great in fall gardens?

Most hydrangeas hold onto their flowers until late fall, fading into warm pink tones that segue into tan. They typically have yellow or gold fall foliage. But oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*), below, is known for its rich burgundy leaves—it's a showstopper in autumn landscapes. Its creamy white flowers dry to pink-beige in late fall and persist during winter.



Q: I see potted hydrangeas at the florist all the time. Can I plant those hydrangeas in the outdoor containers on my patio? If so, what about winter care?

Gift hydrangeas from the florist are grown in greenhouses for a short, intense period of indoor bloom and usually do not adapt well to growing outdoors. For outdoor pots, above, choose compact reblooming bigleaf types, such as 'Endless Summer', 'Let's Dance', or 'Forever & Ever'. Plant them in 18-inch-diameter or larger containers. Potted hydrangeas can dry out quickly, so protect them from afternoon sun. Water regularly with diluted liquid fertilizer to keep them blooming all summer. In Zones 4–5, protect potted hydrangeas in winter by moving the containers to an unheated shed or garage. ☺

PHOTO (LACECAP HYDRANGEA) EMILY J. FOLLOWILL; (OAKLEAF HYDRANGEA) PETE KRUMHARDT; (CONTAINER HYDRANGEA) ED GOHLICH