

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



July 22, 2023

Different Hydrangeas Bring Color to the Landscape

Hydrangeas are certainly noticeable in the landscape with the big cone-shaped or mop head flower shape. Developments in breeding and selection of hydrangeas provide many choices from the peegee or bigleaf type.

In July and August, many pretty white or lime green hydrangea blossoms seen in the landscape have the common name of peegee or panicle hydrangea with the scientific name of *Hydrangea paniculata*.

The leaves of this type are arranged opposite each other on the stem. They are about 3-6 inches long in a somewhat oval shape with an edge described as saw-toothed.

The cluster of flowers on the panicle hydrangea forms a pyramidal shape with small branches coming off a central axis. The base of the flower cluster is wider than the top. The flower head is made up of showy sepals, which surround a sterile flower bud, and fertile buds which lack the showy sepals. The panicles vary in length from 6-8 inches or more depending on the cultivar.

The pH of the soil does not affect the color of the sepals making up the showy flowers of the panicle hydrangea. Most of these have white flowers which naturally turn to a pinkish color with aging and eventually a light tan to brown in the fall.

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The good news is that the flowers are produced on the new wood which makes flowering reliable as compared to the non-reblooming big-leaf hydrangeas. This means that it should be pruned in late winter or early spring. Pruning manages the size of the plant and the number of stems. You may see some cultivars pruned and trained to a single trunk. The plant habit is considered a medium shrub to small tree. Depending on the cultivar, the plant may reach 10 to 20 feet wide and tall.

The panicle hydrangea prefers to grow in full sun, but will grow in partial shade. A well-drained soil that is moist is best.

A common older *Hydrangea paniculata* cultivar found in the landscape is 'Grandiflora'. It reaches 10 to 25 feet tall. The sterile florets cover conical flowers 6 to 8 inches long. The weight of the flowers causes the branches to arch downward.

A new cultivar in the landscape of *Hydrangea paniculata* is Limelight. It grows 6 to 8 feet tall and wide. The sterile flower sepals emerge white and change to chartreuse-lime and eventually change to pink-rose tones before turning tan. The weight of the flowers causes the branches to arch downward. For smaller spaces, the cultivar 'Jane' sold as Little Lime (*Hydrangea paniculata*) is 3 to 5 feet tall and wide with a mounding habit.

The colorful hydrangeas which bloom in the spring with the mophead type of flower are the bigleaf hydrangeas, *Hydrangea macrophylla*. The flowers are usually pink or blue. Flower color depends on the pH of the soil. Some hydrangeas will respond to a soil pH of 6.0 to 6.5 with a pink flower color. Soil pH of 5.0 to 5.5 will result in a blue flower color. Some hydrangeas stay a pink color even though the pH is low.

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Bigleaf hydrangeas grow best in moist, well-drained soil and partial shade. If planted in full sun, they wilt in the summer heat and are not recommended. A good location is the north side of the house or building.

The two common types of flower heads available for bigleaf hydrangea are mophead or lacecap. Mophead type makes a full, large, round ball of showy sepals, which surround the sterile flower bud. Lacecap type has flower buds surrounded by sepals along the outside edge of the flower head. The inside of the flower head has fertile buds which lack showy sepals.

Most bigleaf hydrangeas, especially older cultivars, bloom on the previous season's growth. Part of last year's growth may be injured by cold weather during many winters. Until it begins to flower, it is hard to know if the flower buds are living or if they have been injured by cold temperatures. Many stems were killed this year due to the freezing temperatures.

Today, there are reblooming bigleaf hydrangeas with flowers produced on new wood too which is also called the current season's growth. This type usually blooms later. In 1998, a true reblooming hydrangea was patented and trademarked as Endless Summer® (*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Bailmer'). This plant has the mophead flower type in pink or blue color, depending on the pH. The flower may reach up to 8 inches in diameter. The plant is 3 to 4 feet tall.

A lacecap flower type that blooms on old and new wood is Endless Summer® 'Twist-n-Shout'. It produces lipstick pink large, showy sepals in a soil pH of 6-7. In a pH range of 5-5.8, the small fertile buds have a periwinkle hue with the showy sepals staying a rich pink color. This plant has glossy green leaves and red stems.

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There are many cultivars of *Hydrangea macrophylla* and *paniculata* available. Enjoy growing them. For more information contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or Annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

If you are looking for an opportunity to volunteer, the Extension Master Gardener Course trains volunteers to expand horticultural, science-based knowledge among the community. Applications for the program and competitive scholarships are available upon request at the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office. Classes are scheduled for Friday mornings from 9:00 a.m. to noon starting September 8. The scholarship application is due July 28. Class Application and registration fee of \$85 are due by August 4. Class size is limited.

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