

Pruning Techniques for Hydrangeas

A guide to pruning the different types of Hydrangeas



To prune in the spring or the fall... When it comes to Hydrangeas, there are specific times of the year, depending on the type, to prune them. How can you tell? The flower shape will give you an indication. How important is it to prune only when directed? Very!

Arborescens Hydrangea

'Annabelle' and 'Invicibelle' Hydrangeas are common arborescens Hydrangeas, known for their distinctive mophead white blooms. The arborescens Hydrangea blooms on new wood, therefore the plant should be pruned back to allow new growth every year. While it is not wrong to prune in very early spring, fall pruning in this area is usually preferred.

However, fall pruning should be delayed until the plant has gone into dormancy, (leaves have dried and preferably fallen off). The pruning technique is quite simple for the arborescens Hydrangea, simply cut each stem off leaving 6-10 inches. For fertilization, apply the *Fertilome Tree and Shrub Food* in mid to late May during the spring.

Macrophylla Hydrangea

The macrophylla Hydrangea is also classified as a mophead type of Hydrangea; however, these varieties may bloom on either old or new wood. The Endless Summer series are popular varieties suitable for planting that in zone 4.

The macrophylla Hydrangea should never be pruned in the fall. Growth should start in the spring before any pruning is done. While zone 4 plants may grow back on old wood, it's common to trim out old stems during that period, enabling new growth to flourish and generate fresh for the season. If your macrophylla Hydrangea buds on old wood, then only trim to shape the plant and remove any old blooms, trimming just above the first bud showing growth.



Paniculata Hydrangea

What are paniculata Hydrangeas? They are a very common type of hydrangea known for their panicle or cone-shaped flowers. Popular varieties include 'Quick Fire,' 'Firelight,' and 'Limelight.' Many hydrangeas suitable for zones 3 and 4, and capable of being planted in partial to full sunlight, fall under the paniculata classification. Paniculata Hydrangeas bloom on old wood, so you will never want to prune this type of Hydrangea to the ground. Instead, opt for thinning or shaping cuts.

While it might be tempting to prune those dried flower buds for the fall, it's actually better to leave them until Spring! Specifically, in early spring when the leaf buds are just beginning to crack open. Once spring arrives, start by evaluating the shrub and determine if the plant needs thinning. If the shrub is determined to be too thick, choose the oldest branches (typically the thickest) and prune out no more than a third of the total plant. Pruning as close to the bottom of the shrub is ideal for this type of thinning, making sure to not leave any stubs.

If upon examination, it is determined that the plant does not need thinning, then trimming back each stem's end will be sufficient. Make your cuts just above the top leaf bud, being careful not to leave a stub. Do this to your entire plant, shaping it as you go. Wait 2-3 weeks after you prune your Hydrangea and fertilize with *Fertilome Tree and Shrub Food*.