

Frost Dates and Hydrangeas

Before we get to our question of the week, we wanted to share some insight with you all chomping at the bit to get that garden going for spring. We had another cold morning this week (mid 30s) and there may be another night that some of you will have to get out there and cover up your plants for fear of frost burning them.

According to this website: <https://garden.org/apps/frost-dates/>, our last date to expect a frost is May 15. This date is a week past the northeast Tennessee folklore of “don’t plant any tomatoes before Mother’s Day”. *The Tennessee Vegetable Garden: Garden Planning, Plant Preparation and Planting*, UT publication W346-B

<https://extension.tennessee.edu/publications/Documents/W346-B.pdf> states our safe day to begin planting warm-season vegetables in the Tri-Cities area is May 3rd. However, the safe day in Mountain City is May 26th. Many Northeast Tennessee gardeners have been “burned” in more ways than one by planting ahead of Mother’s Day. Be patient, it’s only another week.

Q. I have a quick question regarding a plant that I have had in my yard for 40+ years. I don't know the official name, but I have always heard them called "snowball bushes". These particular bushes were cuttings from bushes that my mother had for many years. They have always bloomed large white blooms until the last three years. Now the blooms have a green tint and are nowhere close to white. The blooms are also smaller than they have ever been. I think the bushes are in the hydrangea family, but they have never had color to them other than white. They bloom from June until fall of the year. I think it's likely something to do with the soil, but I thought I should reach out and ask for help. Any input is GREATLY appreciated!

A. There is an answer to your green flower question: Light.

Has the drainage around your house changed or is there a new tree nearby that might affect the Hydrangea’s PH and shade? Snowball Hydrangeas need some morning sun and afternoon shade. Has a nearby tree grown to the point of giving your hydrangea too much shade? Your soil may indeed be an issue as you suspect. This shrub likes a PH between 5.5 and 6. You may want to try an acid fertilizer on them, similar to that used on azaleas. Also, they need well-drained soil but don’t like dry soil. Remember that Hydrangeas should be pruned back hard in the late winter.

We also learned that there are “Snowball” Hydrangeas as well as “Snowball” Viburnum. The Hydrangea (USDA zones 3-9) is more cold-tolerant than the Viburnum (USDA zones 3-6). The Viburnum will grow to 10-12 ft high, and the Hydrangea will grow to 4-6 ft high. The blooms of the Hydrangea are typically 7-8 inches across while the Viburnum has blooms 8-12 inches across.

We hope this information is helpful and that your blooms turn white again.

The Master Gardeners of Northeast Tennessee