

Hydrangeas Not Blooming

Q - My Hydrangeas did not bloom well this year. Is there anything that I can do to ensure more blooms?

A – We are sorry to hear that your Hydrangeas did not bloom well for you this year, they are some of the showiest flowers in a summer garden. Pruning at the wrong time of year is the most common reason for a lack of blooms. Each species of Hydrangea requires a different pruning procedure, and it is important to identify your variety first and then apply the correct method of pruning for its particular needs.

The three most common cultivars of Hydrangea grown in East Tennessee are the Big Leaf (*H. macrophylla*), the Panicle (*H. paniculata*), and the Smooth Leaf (*H. arborescens*). Here is a link to a publication to help identify your variety:

<https://www.tnstate.edu/faculty/ablalock/documents/Hydrangea.pdf>

The Big Leaf Hydrangea is easily recognizable with its large mophead or lace cap flowers whose colors can be altered from pink to blue by adjusting the pH of the soil. They prefer morning sun and afternoon shade. These shrubs don't really need pruning unless you prefer a different shape or there is a lot of dead wood. (Be sure to make a small nick in the stem first to ensure no green wood shows under the bark). The Big Leaf Hydrangeas can present the biggest challenge for growing more blooms as all of the flower buds grow on the previous year's stems. If you prune back the stems after the flowers are finished blooming in the late summer or early fall, you will most likely be cutting off next year's flowers. It is best to prune back the stems in early August after deadheading the spent flowers and before a temperature drop when next year's buds will set. Timing is everything here and you really only have a few weeks to get it done so you may want to get it on your calendar now. You can prune the 4 D's: diseased, dying, damaged or dysfunctional at any time of year.

The Panicle Hydrangea has beautiful white cone shaped flowers that can fade to pink as they age. This shrub loves full sun and can grow to 10 feet tall or more so many gardeners train a central stem to shape them as trees. The *H. quercifolia* blossoms grow on new wood and bloom from July through the end of summer until the first frost. These shrubs do best when pruned in late winter or early spring before new growth appears.

The Smooth Leaf Hydrangea has been cultivated since the 1960's and like its name suggests, it has large smooth leaves with beautiful round, cream-colored flowers that can fade to a light green color. You cannot influence the color of this variety by changing the pH of its soil. It also grows on new wood and needs to be pruned in late winter or early spring. This variety can be pruned back even with the ground, but many gardeners leave 18-24" of old wood so the softer new growth has some support.

I hope this information has been helpful and your Hydrangeas put on a show again next year. And remember, as mentioned earlier, you can prune diseased, damaged, dead, and dysfunctional stems and branches anytime of the year of any variety of Hydrangea.

The Northeast Tennessee Master Gardeners