

HYDRANGEAS – STARS OF THE SUMMER GARDEN

John Frett

Hydrangea is an amazingly diverse genus full of summer flowering species. All have four petals and typically a mixture of showy sterile and less prominent fertile flowers. Most hydrangea flowers work well as cut or dried for decorative purposes. Flower color ranges from white for most species but blue or pink for others, varying based on soil pH. Hydrangeas are able to fill almost any garden niche. Many will flourish in full sun, all will tolerate dappled shade, and a few thrive in full shade. Plants are typically easy to grow, preferring moist, well-drained, loamy soil. They range from vines, to compact shrubs, to large shrubs but the current trend is to breed for more compact plants that are sized for the small, urban landscape. Below is a selection of the more unusual and popular species.

Latin name Common name Mature Size Light Soil Pot Size, Plant Size Price

Smooth Hydrangea is a small to medium native shrub, noted for its large globose white flower clusters in the summer that dry brown and persist into the winter. The dense twiggy habit responds well to regular removal of weak, old stems in order to maximize flowering. Flowers on current season's growth.

Hydrangea arborescens 'Abetwo'
Incrediball™ Smooth Hydrangea 4–5 ○●☁ 3 g, 2 \$35
Huge, globose white flower clusters are up to 12 inches in diameter, much more upright than the traditional 'Annabelle'. June to August. N

Hydrangea arborescens 'Hayes Starburst'
Smooth Hydrangea 4–5 ○●☁ 1 g, 1 \$25
Not quite globe form, yet not quite flat topped, the white 3–4 inch flower clusters sport numerous star-shaped sterile flowers that are dramatically double petaled. June–July. N

Rough-leaved Hydrangea is anything but rough. The leaves are large and densely hairy, like velvet. The summer flowers are flat, lacey clusters with a ring of white, sterile flowers that surround blue fertile flowers in the center. The nomenclature is terribly confused but that does not make the plants any less beautiful. Fall color is yellow.

Hydrangea aspera ssp. *macrophylla*
Rough-Leaved Hydrangea 4–7 ○●☁ 1 g, 1 \$25
Seldom seen in garden centers, this is a unique hydrangea whose leaves are covered in velvety soft hair. The summer flower clusters have sterile white flowers that surround a center of pale purple fertile flowers.

Bracted Hydrangea is a close relative of the previous species but much more compact. The velvety leaves are more lustrous on the upper surface. Flowers are lacecap form with sterile flowers that surround typically lavender fertile flowers in the center.

Hydrangea involucrata 'Wim Rutten'
Blue Bunny™ Bracted Hydrangea 2–4 ○●☁ 3 g, 1–2 \$35
This dwarf plant is ideal for small gardens or containers. The summer lacecap inflorescences have pale blue to white sterile flowers and deeper blue fertile flowers. Unlike other hydrangeas, the plant continues to produce new flowers into the fall, so there is always fresh color on the plant.

Bigleaf Hydrangea has been grown in its native Japan for centuries before being imported to Europe and the United States. It is a traditional plant from Victorian gardens that maintains its popularity to this day. Small to medium sized plants produce pink flowers in neutral to basic soils and blue flowers in acidic soils. Plants have either mophead globose flower clusters or lacecap clusters that are flat with large petaled, sterile flowers surrounding apetalous, fertile flowers in the center.

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Ayesha'
Bigleaf Hydrangea 3–5 ○●☁ 1 g, 1 \$25
The unusual flower is bicolored; pale pink or mauve on the edge to white in the center of the cup shaped petals of this mophead inflorescence.



Hydrangea arborescens 'Hayes Starburst'
in Liz Sharp's garden
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Hydrangea macrophylla 'Ayesha' in pink
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Hydrangea involucrata 'Wim Rutten'
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Hydrangea arborescens 'Abetwo'
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer

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Hydrangea macrophylla 'Blaumeise'
Bigleaf Hydrangea 6–7 ○●☁ 1 g, 1–2 \$25
A stunning lacecap developed in Switzerland, 'Blaumeise' has large flat flowers composed of very wide deep purple blue sterile florets surrounding tiny indigo blue fertile flowers.
PATRON EVENING ONLY

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Hororb'
Abracadabra™ Orb Bigleaf Hydrangea 3–4 ○●☁ 3 g, 1–2 \$35
A member of the Abracadabra™ hydrangea series. The sterile flowers of this mophead inflorescence emerge green and peach before maturing to hot pink (blue in acid). The mahogany-colored stems offer a dramatic contrast to the flower color.

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Lynn'
Let's Dance® Starlight Hydrangea 2–3 ○●☁ 3 g, 1–2 \$35
A member of the Let's Dance® series, with very compact, reblooming, lacecap hydrangea flowers on both new and old wood providing an extended season of vivid blue to pink color depending on soil pH.

Hydrangea macrophylla 'Madame Emile Mouillere'
Bigleaf Hydrangea 6 ●☁ 1 g, 1–2 \$25
Considered by the late great gardener and writer Christopher Lloyd of Great Dixter to be the best pure white mophead. Tightly packed serrated flowers open wide and push against each other to produce a lacy work of art. Flowers age to blush pink or green and are great to cut and dry. **PATRON EVENING ONLY**

Hydrangea macrophylla 'SMHMP1'
Paraplu™ Bigleaf Hydrangea 2–3 ○●☁ 1 g, 1–2 \$25
The intense color of this dwarf mophead varies from bubblegum pink to intense hot pink, possibly with some purple in acidic soils.



Hydrangea macrophylla 'Tovelit' in Alice Reilly's garden Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Maroon stems of *Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Honorb'
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer

Latin name	Common name	Mature Size	Light	Soil	Pot Size, Plant Size	Price
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<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i> 'Tokyo Delight'	Bigleaf Hydrangea	3–5	☉ ☁	☹	3 g, 1–2	\$35
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An old lacecap favorite with outer white sterile flowers that slowly mature to burgundy around bright blue to mauve fertile flowers.

<i>Hydrangea macrophylla</i> 'Tovelit'	Bigleaf Hydrangea	3–4	☉ ☁	☹	1 g, 1–2	\$25
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The rose to mauve colored flowers and the uniquely serrated petals of the flowers gives this mophead abundant charm.

Panicle Hydrangea is another old time standard that has graced gardens for decades. They have typically been the largest plants of the hydrangeas but current trends in breeding have reduced the size by more than half. What used to be a small tree form is now a midsized shrub. The enormous conical-shaped flowers appear to be mostly showy sterile florets but upon closer inspection, the numerous fertile flowers are held inside. Generally, flowers are white and may fade to pink before drying to brown. Several new selections turn pink quicker and retain more vivid pink longer, even on dried flowers. Panicle hydrangeas flower on current season's growth and therefore should be pruned in late winter or early spring.

<i>Hydrangea paniculata</i> 'Ivomindy'	Mega Mindy™ Panicle Hydrangea	5–6	☉ ☁	☹	1 g, 1–2	\$25
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The compact plants produce large upright panicles on sturdy stems. Flowers begin white then fade to striking pinkish red in late summer.

<i>Hydrangea paniculata</i> 'SMHPFL'	Fire Light™ Panicle Hydrangea	5–7	☉ ☁	☹	3 g, 2–3	\$35
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This selection is much smaller than the species and has pure white flowers that transition to pomegranate–pink by late summer, retaining color into fall.

Oakleaf Hydrangea is appropriately named for the large, coarse textured foliage that remotely resembles that of an oak. Large flower clusters are globose to conical in form with numerous showy sterile flowers mixed in with small fertile flowers. The white flowers fade to pink in fall and dry brown, often remaining on the plants into winter. In fall, the leaves turn rich shades of mahogany-red.

<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> 'Amethyst'	Oakleaf Hydrangea	5–6	☉ ☁	☹	3 g, 2–3	\$35
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The unique white flower clusters mature a striking rich wine red unmatched by any other oakleaf hydrangea. **N**

<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> 'Bridal'	Snowflake™ Oakleaf Hydrangea	5–6	☉	☹	3 g, 2–3	\$35
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Huge pendulous flowers open white and fade to purple pink. Sterile flowers double petaled. June bloom. **N**

<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> 'Little Honey'	Oakleaf Hydrangea	3–4	☉ ☁	☹	1 g, 1	\$25
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Foliage emerges gold, fades to chartreuse, then burgundy red in fall. Do not plant in full sun; leaves will burn. Summer white flowers may develop slight pink as they mature. **N**

<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> 'Munchkin'	Oakleaf Hydrangea	3–5	☉ ☁	☹	3 g, 1–2	\$35
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This compact plant was bred at the U.S. National Arboretum and produces abundant 6.5 inches long white flowers that gradually turn medium pink. **N**

<i>Hydrangea quercifolia</i> 'Ruby Slippers'	Oakleaf Hydrangea	3–4	☉ ☁	☹	3 g, 1–2	\$35
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Also bred at the U.S. National Arboretum and possibly the most compact of the oakleaf hydrangeas. This selection has 9-inch long summer flowers that open white, quickly turning pale pink and deepening to rose. **N**

Latin name	Common name	Mature Size	Light	Soil	Pot Size, Plant Size	Price
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Mountain Hydrangea is so similar to bigleaf hydrangea, that they are sometimes treated as a variety or subspecies of bigleaf hydrangea. Mountain hydrangea differs in that it is a more compact plant with smaller leaves and flowers. Plants are also more cold hardy than bigleaf hydrangea. Flower clusters are either mophead or lacecap and range from blue to pink base on soil pH and aluminum availability.

<i>Hydrangea serrata</i> 'Blue Deckle'	Mountain Hydrangea	2–3	☉ ☁	☹	1 g, <1	\$25
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The petals on the sterile flowers are variously serrated, and at times give a distinctly frilly appearance—an elegant plant. Flower color is pale pink to lavender in neutral soils, blue in acid soil. Leaves turn reddish in the fall.

<i>Hydrangea serrata</i> 'Grayswood'	Mountain Hydrangea	4–5	☉ ☁	☹	1 g, <1	\$25
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The lacecap inflorescences have pale blue fertile to white sterile flowers changing to crimson red in fall. Leaves can be splashed pale green and darker green.

<i>Hydrangea serrata</i> 'MAKD'	Tiny Tuff Stuff™ Mountain Hydrangea	1–2	☉ ☁	☹	3 g, 1–2	\$35
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One of the shortest lacecap hydrangeas, with double sterile flowers. Selected for improved bud and stem hardiness, it also consistently reblooms. Flower color ranges to soft shades of blue, pink, or white depending on soil pH, then age to pink.



Hydrangea macrophylla 'Lynn'
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Hydrangea quercifolia 'Little Honey' in Liz Sharp's garden
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Hydrangea serrata 'Grayswood' in Alice Reilly's garden
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer

Latin name	Common name	Mature Size	Light	Soil	Pot Size, Plant Size	Price
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Hydrangea serrata 'Miyama Yae-murasaki'
Mountain Hydrangea 3-4 ○●☁ 1 g, 1 \$25
Unusual lacecap clusters have double flowers ranging from rich purple to blue. This selection was first introduced as 'Purple Tiers'. Early blooming.

Hydrangea serrata 'Preziosa'
Mountain Hydrangea 3-4 ○●☁ 1 g, <1 \$25
Globose flower clusters display progression of colors, from white, to pink rose, to purplish red by late summer. Dark maroon stems contrast well with the green leaves that turn red to purple in the fall.

Hydrangea Vine One is and one is not; a hydrangea that is. Two similar vines that adhere to rough surfaces such as masonry and tree bark and also possess numerous white flat-topped flower clusters ringed by white sterile flowers in the summer. They differ in that *H. anomola* ssp. *petiolaris* has four petals while *S. hydrangeoides* has only one large petal per sterile flower.

Hydrangea anomola ssp. *petiolaris* 'Skylands Giant'
Hydrangea Vine vine ●●☁ 1 g, 2 \$25
A local selection from Skylands, NJ, this cultivar is distinctive because of its larger, white, lacecap flower clusters and greater number of larger sterile flowers surrounding the inflorescence. Deep green summer foliage.

Schizophragma hydrangeoides 'Moonlight'
Japanese Hydrangea Vine vine ●●☁ 2 g, 2 \$25
The silvery, blue green foliage and 8-10 inch white flower clusters in summer set this elegant vine apart.



Hydrangea serrata 'Blue Deckle' in Liz Sharp's garden
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer



Hydrangea serrata 'Preziosa' in Alice Reilly's garden
Photo: Melinda Zoehrer

QUICK REFERENCE FOR CULTURAL SYMBOLS

All plant heights listed in catalog are in feet. No inches are used.

In order to help you select the right plant for your gardening needs, we have included the symbols below to indicate plant needs. These are broad guidelines, as plants can often withstand a wider range of conditions. Plants that prefer part shade may grow well in full sun if there is adequate soil moisture during hot, dry spells. Similarly, plants that prefer moist soils may grow well in drier sites if some shade is provided, especially midday.

Light Recommendations

○ full sun ● partial sun ● full shade

Soil Moisture Recommendations

☁ dry soils ☁ moist soil ☁ wet soils

N after the plant description indicates plants are native to the Eastern U.S. We consider cultivars of native plants to be native, regarding them as selections from variants in the population.

☎ Provides above average support for adult butterfly, moth, or skippers and/or Lepidoptera larvae (caterpillar)

☎ Plant provides food source for birds