

'Pruning Hydrangeas on The Cape & Islands'

The Cape Cod Hydrangea Society

Harwich, MA May 9, 2009

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Today's Topics

- * Pruning Your Hydrangeas – The Details
- * Pinching to Improve New Plant Development
- * Today's Plant Sale

Definitions

- * Deciduous All the 'Common' Hydrangea Species are deciduous losing their leaves with decreasing photo period and frost in fall and remaining dormant through winter.
- * 'Old Wood' Macrophylla & Serrata flower buds form during late summer - early fall but typically don't become flowers until following summer.
- * 'New Wood' Arborescens & Paniculata flowers form and bloom in a single growing season. Some Macrophylla cultivars also develop blooms on 'new' wood.

Pruning Macrophyllas

- * Flowers Mainly on OLD Wood, Some on NEW
- * Old & New Canes Distinguishable by Color
- * Winter-kill can be Severe in Open & Windy Sites
- * Generally Early to Break Bud
- * Remove Winter-kill, Prune Back to Live Buds
- * Remove Old Canes to Encourage New Basil Growth
- * Prune Errant Branch Growth to Maintain Good Form

Pruning Serratas

- * Very Similar to Macrophyllas - Flowers on OLD Wood
- * Old & New Canes Distinguishable by Color
- * Winter-kill Less Severe, Except Open & Windy Sites
- * Slower to Break Bud
- * Remove Winter-kill, Prune Back to Live Buds
- * Remove Old Canes to Encourage New Basil Growth
- * Some Varieties Develop Dense Basil Growth – can be difficult to 'Open' Prune

Pruning Arborescens

- * Flowers on NEW Wood
- * Canes are Soft, Winter-kill can be Severe
- * Slower to Break Bud
- * 2 Pruning Techniques:
 - * Maintain a Basic Framework
 - * Cut Nearly to Ground

Pruning Paniculatas

- * Flowers on NEW Wood
- * Canes are Hard, Winter-kill is Modest
- * Slowest to Break Bud
- * Strong Growers – Don't be Afraid!
- * But, Branches Tend to Fracture Easily
- * Prune to Maintain Good Framework

Pruning Quercifolias

- * Flowers on OLD Wood
- * Canes are Hard but Buds are Soft
- * Winter-kill generally Modest except in Windy Sites
- * Slower to Break Bud
- * Well Developed Plants are Strong Growers
- * Best to Site in Woodland Setting to Grow Naturally
- * Prune Minimally – Only to Maintain Good Form

Pruning Anomalas

- * Flowers on OLD Wood
- * Long-lived Plants but Slow to Flower, 3 to 5 Years!
- * Grown Mainly for Interesting Form, Bark & Foliage
- * Tough Plants, Winter-kill is Minimal
- * Early Bud Break but Slow to Leaf-out
- * Well Developed Plants are Strong Growers
- * Prune Minimally – Only to Maintain Good Form

Let's Summarize

- * Early Spring is the Preferable Pruning Time!
- * Pruning is Part Science and Part Aesthetics
- * Macrophyllas and Serratas: Best to Annually Remove Aging Canes and Winterkill from New Wood, cut Stems back to First Pair of Live Buds
- * Paniculatas: Prune Primarily to Achieve and Maintain Good Plant Form
- * Arborescens: Respond Well to Pruning - Major Surgery Produces Fewer But Larger Blooms
- * Quercifolias: Little if Any Pruning Required, Best to Let Plant Develop Naturally as in Native Woodland Setting

Fertilizing

- * Hydrangeas typically require low fertilizer addition
- * Soil composition should be the primary 'fertilizing' concern; best 'recipe' has an open, airy texture, is free-draining, and contains a high organic content. Soil testing can help
- * Apply fertilizer at pruning time
- * For 'Blue' macrophyllas, use slow release fertilizers having low Phosphorus levels (the P in the NPK ratio). Osmocote® or Sta-Green® 19-6-12 (4 to 6 month 'release' period) are good choices. Phosphorus counteracts aluminum uptake in the plant's system, low levels = better 'Blues'
- * Osmocote® 14-14-14, Sta-Green® 17-17-17, MiracleGrow® 15-30-15 (water soluble) are good general garden fertilizers and work well on 'Pink' and 'Red' macrophyllas
- * Fertilize 'White' macrophyllas and all other Hydrangea Species – arborescens, paniculatas, quercifolias, anomalas (climbers) the same as for 'Pinks' and 'Reds'

Bloom Color Enhancement

- * 'Enhancement' is the Key Word
- * It's a pH Thing; 5.0 to 5.6 = Blue, 6.0+ = Pink
- * Mainly Applicable to Mophead Macrophyllas
- * Cultivars having Pale Bloom Pigment - 'Nikko Blue' - can be readily 'adjusted' between Pink and Blue
- * Medium Blue Varieties - 'Mathilda Gutges' - can be enhanced to more brilliant blue / purple hues via Aluminum Sulfate
- * Pale to medium Pinks and Reds exhibit deeper tones with Lime application

Enhancing Pinks & Reds

- * Changing from blue to pink requires changing from an acid soil to a more neutral one
- * Many garden soils in Eastern US are closer to neutral - 6.0 to 6.5 - and will produce pink blooms with no extra effort required
- * Use dolomitic lime to raise pH, apply in the fall at moderate application rates – ½ to 1 cup per plant
- * Thoroughly water the plant after application
- * Aim for a pH of 6.0 to 6.3, yearly soil testing is very worthwhile
- * Check pH of your water source; lower levels from well water may counteract your 'pinking' effort
- * Be patient; it may take a couple of years to 'sweeten' a strongly acidic soil

Enhancing Blues & Purples

- * Using a soil acidifier will lower the pH of your soil to 5.2 to 5.6 and produce rich blue flowers
- * Aluminum sulfate is the preferred acidifier; 1 tablespoon / gallon
- * Plant should be well-watered before adding any acidifier
- * Apply early in the Spring to the base of the plant – 1/2 to 2 gallons / plant depending on plant size
- * Check the pH of your water source. Municipal water suppliers may be buffering (raising) pH levels; adjust your bluing frequency to compensate
- * Remember that concrete foundations and walkways tend to leach lime and raise the pH in the immediate area
- * Applying elemental sulfur or iron sulfate works too; Sulfur works slowly, Iron more quickly but requires more of it
- * Again, patience and persistence are often required to obtain the best blues

Pinching' – A Form of Pruning

- * Particularly Appropriate for New Plants to Encourage Branching and Plant Development
- * Pinched Single Stems will Produce New Stems from Each Pair of Nodes – in effect, Doubling the Number of Stems AND Flower Buds
- * Best to Finish Pinching by mid-July to Insure Complete Bud Development

New Varieties for Your Garden

Macrophyllas

'Twist & Shout'
'Queen of Pearls'
'Midnight Duchess'
'Moonlight' (Let's Dance)
'Starlight' (Let's Dance)
'Berlin' (Cityline)
'Paris' (Cityline)
'Venice' (Cityline)
'Vienna' (Cityline)

Paniculatas

'Quick Fire'
'Pinky Winky'
'Daruma'
'Phantom'
'Limelight'

Arborescens

'Incrediball'
'Spirit' (2010)
'Pink Annabelle' (2010)

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