

# Hydrangea



# How-To!!!

**Do you grow hydrangeas? Would you like a simplified approach to fertilizing them? to pruning them?**

**If so, read on...**

**Let's start with fertilizing. There are several options.**

1. Use a **fast-release fertilizer**, fertilizing **lightly** in March, May, and July.

Most chemical fertilizers are rapid-release. **Complete fertilizers** are fast-release chemical fertilizers containing nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium (10-10-10 or 5-5-5 for example). Annuals benefit from rapid-release fertilizers since they flower in one growing season. However, hydrangeas and the like are not annuals and fertilizing three times is labor-intensive. So, read on...

2. Use a **slow-release fertilizer** in the spring when the shrub is beginning to leaf out and again in the fall. Use half the recommended amount when fertilizing in the fall. Be sure to cover with soil when applying. HollyTone is an organic slow-release fertilizer. It is an Espoma product specially formulated to fertilize acid-loving plants. When used according to directions, it is very effective.

3. Adding **compost** to the soil is always a good idea. Compost is also a **slow-release** fertilizer since it works as it breaks down. The only downside here is that, while it is a good general soil additive. It may not be quite as effective as a fertilizer designed to address the specific needs of acid-loving plants like those listed above.

4. There is also a rather **unconventional** way to fertilize your hydrangeas. **Coffee grounds**. Yes, those brown flecks that invariably end up on your kitchen floor. Coffee grounds are acidic

and will add acid to the soil. This can make your blue mophead and lace cap hydrangeas even bluer. Coffee grounds can be scratched in the ground around your plants; added to a bucket of rain water and allowed to sit for a day before using; or added to your compost pile. If they are used by themselves, there is a danger of over-fertilizing and thus burning the plant.

My vote for hydrangea fertilizer goes to **Holly-Tone**. Runner-up is basic **compost**.

Whichever method you choose, **scratch the fertilizer into the soil at the drip edge and then water well. Happy Fertilizing!!!**

## Pruning



## Hydrangeas

If you have a garden on Cape Ann, most likely you have a hydrangea or two or ten. Most likely you have asked yourself, “Why didn’t my hydrangea bloom this summer?” Most likely **You** are the reason your hydrangea failed to flower. Certainly **You** can be the solution to the problem of non-blooming hydrangeas. **The probable cause of non-blooming hydrangeas is pruning at the wrong time.**

You can **deadhead spent blossoms anytime**. If you cut the flowers for arrangements in June or July, you can cut long stems; after that cut short ones so new buds can set. It is always safe to cut down to the first pair of large leaves. You can **remove dead branches anytime** by cutting them down to the base.

**Pruning can be beneficial.** If the hydrangea is more than five years old, cut one third of the branches down to the ground (preferably the thicker ones or straight ones). This will revitalize the plant. If it is too large, you can prune it in June or July.

**Pruning** isn’t difficult but timing is important. First **determine what variety of hydrangea you have**. If you don’t know, photograph the plant in bloom and either take the photo to your local nursery or download a gardening app to find the answer. (I use the app Garden Answers). **See below for more information on varieties of hydrangeas.**

**Method 1 for pruning mophead, lace cap and oak leaf hydrangeas:** These varieties bloom on old wood (stems that have been on the plant since the previous summer). Prune these in June or

July just after blooming because they set buds for the next year in August. Mopheads don't ever have to be pruned but if you do prune them, prune before August. NOTE: Endless Summer hydrangeas are mopheads that can be pruned anytime without affecting blooms.

**Method 2 for pruning PG and smooth leaf hydrangeas:** These varieties bloom on new wood and can be pruned in early spring, fall, or winter but not when preparing to bloom in the summer. They don't need pruned annually but, once established, you can prune to the ground every year to encourage growth or prune 1/3rd to keep the plant tidier. NOTE: the tree form of hydrangeas will revert to being a shrub if pruned to the ground.

VARIETIES:

EXAMPLES:

Mophead (macrophylla)

Endless Summer (Blushing Bride is one)  
Color Fantasy, Let's Dance

Oakleaf (quercifolia)  
native to the US  
long cone-shaped flowers

Gatsby Moon, Ruby Slippers

Lacecap (serrata)

Haas Halo, Blue Billow

PG (paniculata)

Quick Fire, Limelight, Tardiva, Bobo

Smooth leaf (arborescens)

Annabelle, Incrediball