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## GARDENER'S REFERENCE

# HYDRANGEA CARE

*The garden hydrangea, Hydrangea macrophylla, has been a popular, low-maintenance garden plant since the early 1900s. Its large, lush foliage and dinner-plate sized blooms make it a star summer attraction in any garden, either grown in the ground or in large containers for a colorful summer display. At*

*Filoli many of its flowers are cut and dried for arrangements, to be enjoyed year-round. Garden hydrangeas can be found in the garage beds of the sunken garden area, in the walled garden tucked behind the green and white trellis, and in the panel gardens at the gate to the woodland garden. Filoli also grows two other related hydrangea species: H. anomala ssp. petiolaris, climbing hydrangea, which grows on some of the woodland garden walls; and H. quercifolia, oak-leaf hydrangea, located at the southern end of the Chartres garden.*

### **Basic Care: *Hydrangea macrophylla***

At a minimum, hydrangeas must be given weekly water. In hot summer months, their leaves quickly show signs of heat stress, but are easily revived with cooler temperatures or by misting their leaves. Hydrangeas usually do best in filtered shade, protected from hot southwest exposure, although they may grow luxuriously given full sun in cool, foggy coastal areas.

In the winter, when the plants have dropped their leaves for dormancy, we prune hydrangeas for size control. Stems are pruned back to buds on strong growth, leaving stems about four feet tall; they can be pruned lower if there is a need for a more compact size, but they will produce fewer blooms the next season. Any dead or weak growth and old canes should be removed entirely, down to the plant's crown, to encourage the renewal of strong new flowering stems. Be aware that hard renovation pruning can remove the next season's flower buds, which form the

year before. If buds are not removed, hydrangeas will bloom from July to November, on the ends of new growth.

Regular fertilization can greatly enhance the summer display; Filoli gardeners apply a general fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, in the fall to encourage root growth, and in the spring when the plants break dormancy.

### **Color Play**

The color of hydrangea blossoms, which varies from white to pink, blue, and chartreuse, can be changed or enhanced by applying amendments that alter soil pH. Blue flowers are the product of acid soil in the range of 5.2-5.5; in November, Filoli's gardeners broadcast ¼-½ lb of aluminum sulfate around the base of large plants, and lightly cultivate it into the organic mulch at the base of each plant. Be aware that if aluminum sulfate is applied to white or pink hydrangeas, it will turn pink hydrangeas blue but have no effect on white blooms.

DEC	
NOV	FERTILIZE
OCT	FERTILIZE
SEP	BLOOM
AUG	BLOOM
JUL	BLOOM
JUN	BLOOM
MAY	FERTILIZE
APR	FERTILIZE
MAR	
FEB	PRUNE
JAN	PRUNE

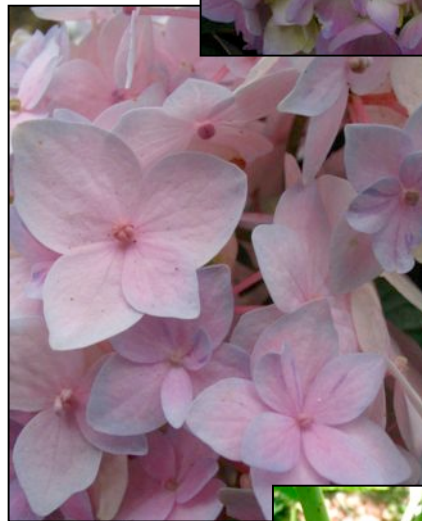
## Dried Flowers

Another wonder of hydrangea blossoms is how beautifully they dry; Filoli's volunteers remove some choice blooms in late summer, into early fall, when the tiny, inconspicuous flowers are fully open and their texture changes from succulent to leathery. If they are too soft with moisture, the heads don't hold their shape and color.

For drying, leaves are removed and flowers are left upright—or hung upside-down for weak stems—in a warm, dry room. Once they are completely dry, they make colorful additions to arrangements later in the year when other flower selections are slim. During the winter holidays, Filoli's volunteers often use them to make wreaths and for decorating garlands and trees. Fresh flowers are also picked in season, conditioned in warm water and used in fresh arrangements throughout the house.



*Dried hydrangeas amid fresh flowers for Filoli's flower arrangers (left), immature blossoms of Hydrangea macrophylla 'Endless Summer', and new shoots from winter pruning cuts. Photos: M. Richards*



### References & Further Reading:

- Cullen, C. (1997). Summer Splendor: The Hydrangeas. *The Sundial Times*, 14, 1-2.  
 Hydrangeas! Hydrangeas!: [www.hydrangeashydrangeas.com](http://www.hydrangeashydrangeas.com)  
 Lawson-Hall, T. and Rothera, B. (1995). *Hydrangeas: A Gardener's Guide*. Portland, OR: Timber Press.

*Filoli Gardener's Reference sheets are created by garden staff to answer common questions regarding Filoli's traditional horticultural practices. This sheet may be accessed from the Filoli website.*

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