

gardening

# HYDRANGEA *love*

STORY **MELANIE REKOLA**

*I'VE BEEN HAVING A NOT-SO-SECRET  
LOVE AFFAIR WITH HYDRANGEAS FOR  
MORE THAN 20 YEARS.*

These beautiful, classic shrubs look great in traditional gardens, mixed gardens and modern gardens. There are so many luscious varieties, but over time (and through trial and error) my tastes have changed. Here is my tried and true list, including straight talk on all the popular varieties and the toughest, best of the best!

The name hydrangea stems from the Greek word for water, hydros and jar, angos, and more than hints at the constant moisture required to keep these plants happy, healthy and blooming. Their long-lasting blooms are not actually flowers, they are actually flower bracts, which explain their very long flowering cycle.

## **PANICLE TYPE** (*HYDRANGEA PANICULATA*)

These are the hearty types with strong woody stems and panicle-shaped flowers that bloom reliably from mid- to late-summer, well into fall. They don't require as much watering as the fancier types and don't require staking. They bloom on new growth each year, so no need to worry about a hard winter destroying tender buds. In colder climates like ours, these beauties take full sun but enjoy protection from the strong afternoon heat. They typically grow between three to eight feet but can be pruned to maintain height. Their leaves are dark green, oval-shaped and turn shades of red/brown in autumn.

## **VANILLA STRAWBERRY**

The fragrant Vanilla Strawberry hydrangea takes a few years to really get growing but when it does – oh my – patience will be rewarded with huge, fluffy and creamy white blooms slowly fading to pink and white bi-coloured flower heads.



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## QUICK FIRE (AND LITTLE QUICK FIRE)

Quick Fire hydrangea (as the name suggests) blooms earlier than all the others. The flowers open white and quickly turn to dark pink. Little Quick Fire is exactly the same except it grows only about four feet in height – great for small spaces.



## BOBO

Bobo hydrangea is a dwarf panicle that is exceptionally floriferous. White blossoms turning to blush pink smother this small-statured three-foot shrub.

## LIMELIGHT AND LITTLE LIME

Yet another wonderful panicle type, Limelight hydrangea sports cool lime-green blooms. Little Lime hydrangea does too, in a smaller size.



## SMOOTH TYPE (HYDRANGEA ARBORESCENS)

Sometimes called wild hydrangeas, these have gorgeous, round snowball blooms that last for weeks in mid/late summer. They are much more shade tolerant than the panicle types but bloom best with some morning sun. They flower on new wood and can be pruned to the ground or near ground level in late winter/early spring to encourage abundant blossoms. The leaves of arborescens are large, dark green, heart-shaped, and thin.



## CLIMBING HYDRANGEA (HYDRANGEA PETIOLARIS)

As the name advises, these hydrangeas are actually vines. Gorgeous white and fragrant lacecap flowers cover this sturdy vine in June/July. Mid-green leaves turn yellowish in fall with pretty peeling bark. This is a slow grower that enjoys a shady spot but can grow 50 feet, so plant wisely.

## BIGLEAF TYPE (H. MACROPHYLLA)

These include both lace-caps and mophead types and are sometimes called French hydrangeas. They have big, glossy leaves and have gorgeous pink, blue, purple or white blossoms and are the fancy kind coveted by many. I hate to be cynical and the bearer of bad news, but in our Ontario climate, this type of hydrangea will often produce lots of leaves, but blossoms can sometimes be a scarcity. Most varieties bloom on old wood, making the flower buds susceptible to killing winter temps, though there are some that flower on both old and new wood. Read below.

## ANNABELLE

Annabelle hydrangea is a well-loved classic hydrangea with tremendous staying power. It has large, pure white snowball blooms but they do tend to flop after a heavy rain. Peony rings work to keep them upright and are quickly hidden by their large leaves or you can prop them up with strategically placed dead branches.



## ENDLESS SUMMER

Endless Summer hydrangea and its offspring (The Endless Summer collection) bloom on old and new wood, making them the most reliable of the bigleaf type for our climate. The blooms of the whole series are beautiful! Just be prepared; they are high-maintenance and if you want to keep them blooming, you need to water them often and just the right amount. They need to be kept moist, but not have wet feet. Best of luck! **OH**

## INCREDIBALL

Incrediball hydrangea is exactly like Annabelle but with even more gargantuan white blossoms the size of basketballs!

