

Your Garden

The Top 10 Reasons To Love Hydrangeas

(NAPSA)—There's nothing wrong with the old-fashioned "snowball" hydrangeas at grandma's house. But today's hydrangeas have gotten a makeover, offering homeowners more choices than ever before. Count down the top 10 reasons to plant them in your landscape.

10. One for any climate. Panicle hydrangeas (*Hydrangea paniculata*) are the toughest, surviving even a Minnesota winter. The flowers form in a large cone shape (called a panicle) and prefer full sun.

Smooth hydrangeas (*Hydrangea arborescens*) are the second hardiest, growing well in cool climates. Flowers form in a snowball shape. The best-known variety, "Annabelle," was discovered growing near Anna, Illinois. It prefers partial shade.

Oakleaf hydrangeas (*Hydrangea quercifolia*), native to the southeast United States, grow in partial shade, showing off attractive shaggy bark, large panicles and oakleaf-shape leaves that sport burgundy or red fall color. Grow a dwarf variety if you have a small yard. Oakleaves tolerate drier conditions than other types.

Mophead hydrangeas (*Hydrangea macrophylla*) display the showiest flower heads and grow best with morning sun, afternoon shade and plenty of moisture. These are the ones people think of when they hear the word "hydrangea."

9. Rebloomers. The Forever & Ever® series of hydrangeas (all mopheads) promises continuous



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blossoms. Technically, they're "remontant," which simply means they bloom on new and old wood. Add a controlled-release, balanced (10-10-10) fertilizer to the soil in spring for a bloom boost. Since new stems grow throughout the summer, keep spent flowers clipped to promote new flowers.

8. Beautiful bouquets. Wait until the flower heads become slightly dry before cutting hydrangeas for bouquets. For fresh bouquets, make an angled cut and place stems into water laced with a floral preservative. Air-dry hydrangeas by hanging them upside down or just arrange them without water in a large vase.

7. Foliage. The star attractions on some hydrangea varieties are their colorful leaves, such as chartreuse-yellow "Lemon Daddy" or variegated green-and-white First Editions Light-O-Day.

6. Pink or blue. Hydrangeas come in an impressive array of

shades including pure white, chartreuse green, blues, purples and pinks. A mophead hydrangea turns blue only if there's aluminum present, found naturally in acidic soils. If your soil is alkaline, add aluminum sulfate to turn blooms blue or just enjoy the pink color.

5. Bicolor or double petals. The cute Forever & Ever® Peppermint looks like someone took a brush and painted a stripe down the center of each petal. Forever & Ever® Double Pink produces twice the number of petals on each tiny flower.

4. Lacecaps. Take a mophead hydrangea, flatten its top and you've got a showy lacecap. Forever & Ever® Summer Lace is the newest of the reblooming lacecaps on the market.

3. Monsters or dwarfs. Want soccer ball-sized flowers? Check out Incrediball, a smooth hydrangea variety. Want a small potted hydrangea for your patio? Many of the mopheads grow less than three feet tall, well suited for a large container.

2. Sun or shade. Hydrangeas need some sun to bloom well, but they don't want to bake in the afternoon; place mopheads in partial shade or a spot where they get afternoon shade. If you've only got full sun, grow panicle hydrangeas. The farther north you live, the more sun the plants need to bloom profusely.

And the No. 1 reason to love hydrangeas?

1. All of the above!