



## Fact Sheet

# Hydrangeas

Hydrangeas belong to the family Hydrangeaceae and are a genus of about 35 species, mainly from America and Asia. These deciduous shrubs are amongst the most popular and widely grown ornamental shrubs.

Hydrangeas are named from the Greek; hodor meaning water and aggos which is a reference to it's cup shaped seed heads. Generally used for mass plantings either on banks, as low screens, borders or even as desired tub specimens hydrangeas are available in many sizes from dwarf varieties of around 60cm to much taller varieties.

They prefer well drained friable soil with plenty of added humus. They will tolerate sun but have a preference for dappled shade. Tasmania's climate is ideal for hydrangeas which prefer mild summers with a cool moist climate. They do not like to dry out.

Hydrangeas flower for several months from early summer on previous years wood so pruning requirements are twofold;

(i) In late winter remove old weak growth and crowded branches

(ii) After flowering cut back branches that have flowered to a pair of plump buds. Shoots that have yet to flower should be left untouched.

They are strong feeders and will benefit with an application of complete fertiliser (such as Dynamic Lifter), whilst flowering fortnightly applications of liquid feed (we recommend Phostrogen) will be extremely beneficial. Mulch to prevent drying out and to improve soil structure.

Propagate from soft tip cuttings in mid spring or mature wood in winter.

They suffer no major disease problems except occasionally mildew which may be cleared by application of Mancozeb. The only major pest problem is hydrangea scale for which white oil is recommended.



**FACT:** Hydrangea arborescens or Wild hydrangea, was used by the Cherokee Indians and settlers for calculous diseases. It did not cure bladder stones, but it did remove gravelly deposits with little pain. One person was known to have as many as 120 calculi.

## Varieties:

### 1. **Hydrangea macrophylla** -

Main variety grown, commonly known as hortensias, these originated in Japan, Korea and China. They have 6-8" corymbs (large flower heads with the outer flowers opening first). There are many hundreds of cultivars grown, many of which are available at our nursery. Flowers fade gracefully and dry most effectively for floral arrangements.

The other variety of *H. macrophylla* are the lace cap types which have large corymbs of fertile flowers ringed by sterile coloured ray florets. These are becoming very popular. Flower colours of the *macrophylla* species vary according to the pH of your soil which affects the availability of aluminium and iron accessible to plants.

Raymond J. Rowell in his excellent book '*Ornamental Flowering Shrubs in Australia*' lists the pH levels and expected colour ranges:

4.5—5.0 violet—deep blue	5.0—6.0 deep mauve	6.0—6.5 mauve pink
6.5—7.0 clear pink	7.0 plus rosy red/light crimson	

White flowering varieties will stay white. Best plant growth occurs in pH range 5.5 to 6.5. Colour can be changed to desired tones either by regular application of proprietary products available at the nursery or by long term soil applications to change soil pH levels.

### 2. **Hydrangea paniculata**

From East China/Japan. Tall shrub to 5m with very large panicles of blooms from creamy white to pink.

### 3. **Hydrangea quercifolia**

Oakleafed hydrangea. Shrub to 2m with lobed leaves reminiscent of an oak, turning lovely autumn shades. Droopy flowers opening green to white. Native of Florida.

### 4. **Hydrangea petiolaris**

Climbing hydrangea, self clinging, vigorous growth, white flowers.



Richmond E. Harrison in his Handbook of Trees and Shrubs tells the lovely story of two New Zealand nurseries some 50 years ago, at a time when horticulturists didn't realise that pH levels affected flower colour. One nursery had acid soil and the other alkaline, as one had pink flowers and the other blue they had a yearly arrangement to exchange several hundred plants. This obviously resulted in much confusion over a number of years.