Serrata (Lacecap, Mountain, or Sawtooth Hydrangea)

Since they bloom on both new and old wood, and are hardier than the *macrophylla* types, you are seeing a few new varieties being promoted on the market, including Tuff Stuff™ and a few relatives thereof. They should be pruned back in the spring in similar fashion to the *macrophylla* types. Protecting some of the lower buds with mulch, as mentioned above, would probably also be a good idea.

Deadheading

Deadheading is the removal of spent flowers, and can be done anytime during the growing season on any of the hydrangeas. If you wish to use the flower heads in dried flower arrangements, cut them with long stems for that purpose. Otherwise, and especially after August 1, just cut the flower head off with very short stems in order not to disturb any buds that are forming already for next year's blooms.

Very helpful information can be found at:
www.provenwinners.com/Hydrangeas-Demystified

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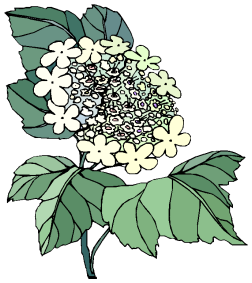

PRUNING HYDRANGEAS

Spring is the time to prune most hydrangeas. However, different families or groups of hydrangeas are pruned differently, so it pays to know which type of hydrangea you have.
The five main groups of hydrangeas are *arborescens, macrophylla, serrata, paniculata, and quercifolia.*

Arborescens
(Smooth Hydrangea)
Hydrangeas in the *arborescens* group include the old standard, 'Annabelle', along with some recent introductions. These include Incrediball®, which has enormous flower heads, and two new pink and red varieties, Incrediball® Blush and Invincibelle® Ruby. These varieties will be less floppy if you cut them back to knee-high in the spring. This will make the stems shorter and stockier so that they will more easily support the large flower heads. Any dead stalks should be cut out, or cut back to live growth.

Quercifolia
(Oak Leaf Hydrangea)
Along with very nice flowers, oak leaf hydrangeas also offer outstanding fall leaf color. The species can get quite tall—up to 8 or 10 feet. 'Alice' is a good variety that is a little shorter, at 6-8 feet. Two newer varieties are shorter still and have pink flowers: Jetstream™ and 'Ruby Slippers'. In very early spring, prune out dead, broken, or crossing branches while it is easy to see what you are doing. On older plants (those that are at least 5 years old), you can cut about 1/3 of the large, older shoots to the ground in order to keep the plant vigorous. Pruning to control size and shape should be done in the summer, right after bloom time.

Macrophylla (Big Leaf Hydrangea)
People often have trouble getting the *macrophylla* varieties to bloom in Illinois. There are many hydrangeas is this group. Commonly seen varieties in this area include 'Glowing Embers', a reliable pink, and the Endless Summer® group, which have blue flowers if the soil is acidic, and pink flowers otherwise. Some *macrophylla* types only flower on old wood, so the trick is to protect some of the buds from winter damage. 'Endless Summer' was developed in Minnesota, where it does quite well because it tends to get protected by a thick blanket of snow. It blooms early on old wood, and then blooms again later on new wood. In Illinois, where we often have some very cold weather with no snow on the ground, the buds on the old wood can get killed, in which case the plant will only produce the later blooms, on new wood. Those varieties that don't bloom on new wood may not bloom at all. In order to protect some of the buds, dump a bag of mulch in the middle of each plant in early November after the weather has started to get fairly cold, but before the really cold temperatures. In late spring, pull the mulch away and cut back any dead tips, generally to around one foot high. The shoots that develop from those lower, protected buds should produce blooms. After the plant has been in the ground for several years, remove a few of the largest stalks each spring to rejuvenate the plant. Also, remove any spindly, snaky branches.

Paniculata (Panicle Hydrangea)
There are several outstanding varieties in the *paniculata* group, including 'Limelight', 'Quick Fire', 'Pinky Winky', and 'Vanilla Strawberry'. These varieties are very hardy and grow into more of a shrub, compared to the slowly spreading "patch" developed by the *arborescens* varieties. Thus, you won't want to cut them back to knee-high each year. Rather, trim back long, slender branches in early spring, leaving only two or three buds, in order to make the plant sturdier and control the size of the shrub. Prune out crossing branches and any branches that detract from a pleasing shape. Some of the varieties in this group can get quite large, but several smaller varieties are coming onto the market now, including 'Little Quick Fire' and Bobo®. If the plant has gotten too large for the space, a more severe pruning can be administered every few years. Better is to plant these varieties where they can be allowed to reach their mature size. The *paniculata* types are sometimes trained into a tree form. These tree forms should be cut back to a sturdy structure in the spring, leaving only a couple of buds on each stem. The idea is to not let the top get too large for the trunk, especially when the plant is young and the trunk is slender.