



Hydrangeas

Hydrangea

Hydrangeas are grown for their spectacular flowers and lush, shrubby foliage. The flower heads are displayed in clusters of colourful bracts, which can be lacecap, ball or conical forms with colours ranging through shades of pink, red, purple, blue and white. The Hydrangea's true flowers are at the centre of these bracts. The flower display can last for months, occurring from late spring onwards. Hydrangeas become available in spring at Heyne's Garden Centre, which is the best time to plant them once the threat of frost has passed.

How to grow:

They grow best in a semi-shaded position where they will receive morning sun but will need to be in shade during the hottest part of the day. Hydrangeas do not like extreme heat and will wilt and scorch under these conditions.

Plant your Hydrangeas in rich, moist soil that drains easily. It is a good idea to improve the soil before planting by mixing through plenty of compost or organic matter.

Hydrangeas need regular watering, particularly in late spring and throughout the summer. The most important thing is not to let them dry out, or they will wilt. It is also important to keep Hydrangeas well-watered while blooms are forming, because if they dry out at this stage the display can be ruined for the season. During the summer months, Hydrangeas growing in the ground may require a deep soaking once or twice a week, whereas Hydrangeas in pots may need daily watering.

Though you need to keep the watering up to Hydrangeas in pots, they make wonderful pot plants. Potting allows the flexibility of moving them out of the way when they are looking bare in winter. Use a large pot and premium potting mix with good drainage.

The flower colour can be altered according to the acidity or alkalinity (pH) of the soil. Hydrangeas grown in acid soil (pH 5 or less) will take on shades of blue, whereas Hydrangeas grown in soil with a pH towards neutral and alkaline (pH 7 or more) will take on shades of mauve, pink and red. White flowering hydrangeas will remain white regardless of soil pH. Keep this in mind when you're deciding between acidic or neutral potting mix.

In spring, add lime (calcium carbonate) to your soil to encourage pink shades or alum (aluminium sulfate) to encourage blue shades.

Alternatively, Hydrangea blueing or pinking soluble mixes are available in packs for easy use. Begin applications in late winter and apply once a month until October, following the directions on the pack. Results may vary, but it can be fun to experiment and create some fascinating in-between shades.

Even if you're not altering the flower color, Hydrangeas still need fertilising. Feed with liquid fertiliser or slow release pellets in spring before flowering begins and again anytime during the growing season. Hydrangeas can be pruned any time after flowering has finished, but it can be left until mid-winter. If they're pruned too heavily year after year, flowering will be reduced. Simply cut back the current season's growth to two leaf buds. Don't cut back into old, grey wood.

Hydrangeas are prone to fungal diseases, particularly powdery mildew. Pull off and dispose of affected leaves. If the problem is severe, spray with a fungicide.