

Garden Column for the Salisbury Post

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It's difficult to imagine a landscape in North Carolina without colorful hydrangeas. These shrubs have always been an old favorite and are even more popular with the newer hybrids. At last count there were over a hundred different varieties including those that vine, dwarf container plants, large oak leafed varieties, red-stemmed hydrangeas, and hydrangeas with pure white blooms. There are too many cultivars available to list, but generally hydrangeas are usually placed in three basic categories: *Hydrangea macrophylla*, also called bigleaf, mop head or French hydrangea, *Oakleaf hydrangea*, *Hydrangea quercifolia*, and *Peegee hydrangea*, *Hydrangea paniculata*

The most popular hydrangea is the big-leaf hydrangea, *Hydrangea macrophylla*. This is an older cultivar usually pink or blue, depending on soil pH. Soil pH affects available aluminum uptake responsible for color change, however, a few white cultivars are available. Newer cultivars such as "Endless Summer" and "Blushing Bride" are touted as ever-blooming type plants. Big leaved hydrangeas should be located in a semi-shaded spot where the soil is moist and well drained.

One of the major problems with bigleaf hydrangeas is damage from the winter freeze a few weeks ago. The late spring freeze severely damaged many bigleaf hydrangeas. Most flower buds develop on the old stems. Once these stems are damaged in a late freeze, new flowers will not appear until the following year and only then if it is a milder spring. This is usually the rule for the vast majority of hydrangeas but there are hydrangea cultivars that will bloom despite cold damage.

Oakleaf hydrangea, *Hydrangea quercifolia*, is a dramatic, white-blooming shrub with four seasons of interest, which includes: fall foliage color, leaf texture and bark interest. Another attribute is its ability to thrive in much dryer locations than its cousins.

Paniculata type hydrangeas, *Hydrangea paniculata*, comes from the fact that the blooms are usually panicle-shaped (somewhat cone shaped) rather than ball-shaped. Often, in late summer, paniculata blooms develop a pink shade as the blooms age, extending their beauty into the fall. A desirable trait of all paniculatas is their tolerance for pruning. One can prune them at any time except when they begin forming bloom heads in the summer. Paniculatas often get very large, but the best known *Hydrangea paniculata* is PeeGee. This hydrangea gets its nickname from its botanical name, *H. paniculata* 'Grandiflora'.

There is a wealth of information including beautiful photos and cultural information at these websites: *Hydrangea* *Hydrangea* <http://www.hydrangeashydrangeas.com/> and The American *Hydrangea* Society <http://www.americanhydrangeasociety.org/>

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