

Hydrangea that will not bloom.

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Q: I have a Hydrangea shrub in my yard but I never blooms. What can I do to get it to bloom?

A: I am assuming that your shrub is a *Hydrangea macrophylla* as they are the most common hydrangeas grown. However there are over seventy-five species of hydrangea. Most are native to China and Japan, although there are several from North America. Of these many species the *Hydrangea macrophylla* is the largest group and comes in two forms: mophead and lacecap. The mophead varieties produce big, round domes of flowers in bright pink, blush, cream, white, and violet or blue. Your *Hydrangea macrophylla*'s lack of flowering can most often be traced to pruning; either at the wrong time or the wrong branches. The mopheads and lacecaps bloom most commonly on previous years' growth or old wood. Pruning in late autumn or early winter will eliminate the flower buds for the next spring leaving you with no blooms.

The solution is to prune in summer when the flowers start to fade, if it is even necessary to prune at all. Only prune if the shrub has grown too big, cut it back after the spring bloom but before late summer. Older shrubs can be thinned by cutting out branches from the base by about one-third of the overall mass of the shrub. This will rejuvenate them, stimulating new shoots from the base.

Hydrangea macrophylla need afternoon shade, rich soil and plenty of water. All

kinds do well in the valley where winters are fairly mild. Those that bloom on old wood are disappointing in cold winter climates where plants freeze to the ground every year.

If you are in a one of the cooler climate areas try a variety that blooms on new wood. These can freeze to the ground (or be pruned hard) every winter, and they will still flower if the season is long enough. 'Endless Summer' is a mophead variety that produces flowers on new wood. A variety with lacecap flowers is 'Blue Wave;' with blue to pink sterile flowers and darker fertile flowers in the center.

Many hydrangeas produce flower clusters that may contain sterile flowers, fertile flowers or may feature a cluster of small fertile flowers surrounded by a ring of big sterile ones, which are called lacecap hydrangeas. The varieties with sterile flowers last a long time, such as *Hydrangea macrophylla*, which has blooms that gradually fade in color.

Pink flower color often indicate neutral or slightly basic soil pH. To change the color of your *Hydrangea* flowers to blue, you can apply Aluminum Sulfate. Soil acidity and the presence of aluminum in the soil affect the color. Apply aluminum sulfate as the plants leaf out in spring and again every couple of weeks until flower buds are visible.

The white flowered Oak leaf hydrangea, 'Hydrangea quercifolia', is an elegant substitute for the Hydrangea macrophyllas and it take less water. This is an American species with large, lobed leaves that are reminiscent of oak leaves. The Oak leaf hydrangeas are less particular about soil and water conditions but still prefer afternoon shade. The Oak leaf hydrangeas give color to the garden over several seasons. They produce long panicles of white flowers in spring that age to pink in summer and then turn dark brown in winter. Then in the fall the large, rough leaves turn beautiful shades of bronze and crimson.