



# Johnson's Garden Talk

Lawn and garden information for the friends and customers of Johnson's Garden Centers

## Johnson's Garden Talk

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## How “Wood” You Prune Hydrangeas?

Alisa DePontier, Johnson's East Store

One of the most frequently asked questions about hydrangeas is, “Why doesn't mine bloom?” The two most common reasons are incorrect pruning techniques and winter kill (or late spring freezes). With hydrangeas, it is often said that no pruning is better than incorrect pruning. This is because there are different types of hydrangeas which require different pruning methods.

Use **PRUNING METHOD ONE** if you have *Hydrangea macrophylla* or mophead (these are the most common hydrangeas grown) or *Hydrangea serrata* which is also called lacecap. *This is also the method to use if you are unsure as to which variety you have.*

Use **PRUNING METHOD TWO** if you have *Hydrangea paniculata*, also known as ‘PeeGee’ or *Hydrangea arborescens* which is sometimes referred to as ‘Annabelle.’

**PRUNING METHOD ONE**— The first method is for hydrangeas that bloom on “old wood.” Stems are considered “old wood” if they have been on the hydrangea for at least 9-10 months before the hydrangea blooms. This means that flower buds are formed on the stems of hydrangeas around August, September or October for the following year. If those stems are pruned in the fall or winter, the flower buds for the spring will be removed and there will be little or no bloom next year.

Occasionally a *macrophylla* or *serrata* will defy this general rule and bloom after being pruned at the wrong time. But, for the vast majority of hydrangeas, pruning after about August/September will eliminate the bloom for the next spring.

Pruning for *macrophylla* and *serrata* merely consists of dead-heading or the removal of spent blooms. Cut the spent blooms, along with the flowering stalk (or flower stem), back to the uppermost pair of new buds. Be careful not to damage any of the new green shoots.

In our area, where heavy freezing is likely, and more often than not we have a late spring frost, a little winter protection is advised. Hilling up mulch or shredded leaves around the plant will diminish die-back and help ensure another season of breath-taking blooms.

**PRUNING METHOD TWO**—The second method is for hydrangea types that bloom on “new wood” or current year's growth. In the spring, when there is no danger of frost damage, annual pruning may be cut back to ground level.

Though versatile and varied, hydrangeas are among the easiest ornamentals to grow. They prefer a humus-rich soil, ample moisture and relief from midday sun. Add an annual pruning—specific to the species—and the needs of these deciduous garden favorites are fairly well met.