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So Many Hydrangeas
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Hydrangeas have big, bold deciduous green leaves and are at their best in a moist spot in dappled shade or morning sun. It's hard to beat hydrangeas in these conditions; they add a cooling touch to the summer garden and beautiful flowers. Hydrangeas have large clusters of long lasting flowers in white, pink, red or blue that bloom from spring to autumn.

There are over seventy-five species of hydrangea. Most are native to China and Japan, although there are several from North America. 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. Sterile flowers last a long time, such as *Hydrangea macrophylla*, commonly called mopheads, which gradually fade in color.

Hydrangea macrophylla is the largest group and come in two forms: mophead and lacecap. Mopheads produce big, round domes of flowers in bright pink, blush, cream, white, violet and blue. The macrophyllas that are not pure white will turn blue if the soil is acidic. 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. Keep in mind that results will vary.

Hydrangea macrophylla lack of flowering can most often be traced to pruning; either at the wrong time or the wrong branches. These bloom most commonly on previous years' growth or old wood. Pruning in late autumn or early winter will eliminate the bloom for the next spring. The solution is to prune in summer when the flowers start to fade if it is even necessary to prune at all. But if the shrub has grown too big, cut it back after the spring bloom but before late

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summer. Older shrubs can be thinned by about one-third to rejuvenate them, stimulating new shoots from the base. *Hydrangea macrophylla* need afternoon shade, rich soil and plenty of water. All kinds do well 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. Those that bloom on new wood can freeze to the ground (or be pruned hard) every winter, and they will still flower if the season is long enough. Popular mophead varieties include 'Glowing Embers' and 'Nikko Blue.' 'Endless Summer' is a 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.

The white flowered Oak leaf hydrangea, '*Hydrangea quercifolia*', is an elegant substitute for the *Hydrangea macrophylla*s. It 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.

Oak leaf hydrangeas produce long panicles of white flowers that age to pink and then turn dark brown in winter. The large, rough leaves turn beautiful shades of bronze and crimson in the fall. *Hydrangea quercifolia* 'Alice' is a deciduous shrub and has rich red foliage in fall. 'Snowflake' bears double panicles of white flowers and 'Snow Queen' has larger flower clusters. Dwarf varieties, like *H. quercifolia* 'Ruby Slippers', grow about four feet tall with white flowers and good fall color. Oak leaf hydrangea is truly a plant for all seasons: it blooms white to pink in spring and summer, and puts on a second show in fall with crimson leaves.

Join Master Gardener Sheri Burke this Saturday, May 21st for a free class on Designing with Perennials. Learn about wonderful plants that return year after year to bring color and form to your garden. After class, tour the nearby Sherwood Demonstration Garden for ideas on how to design your home landscape with perennials that work in our foothill environment. Class is from 9:00 a.m. to noon at Folsom Lake College – El Dorado Center on Campus Drive, Placerville.

UCCE Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions at local Farmer's Markets, and Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.