

I love late July and all of August because it's usually so hot and sunny here in the Northwest. But it's also sad because it reminds me that summer is winding down. I'm glad harvesting summer vegetables, planting winter crops and catching just one or two more garden tours helps capture and prolong summer just a little longer.

My garden is full of hydrangeas right now. A climbing hydrangea (*H. anomala*) with evergreen-looking leaves and white lacy flowers is wending its way up one of our fir trees. Another lacy flowered hydrangea with variegated leaves is tucked in a corner beside the stairs by our deck. We have three beautiful blue hydrangeas in different areas of our garden. One is nestled by a huge towering rhody, one is in full sun beside the driveway and the third (lacecap) is sprawling under a serviceberry tree (*Amalanchier*). An adorable quite small rose pink hydrangea nestles right outside my kitchen window greeting me every morning with its adorableness.

Just in case these weren't enough, this year I brought home three more hydrangeas from Savage Plants. I've added hydrangea (*Aspera*) which can grow 10-20 feet tall and equally as wide. It has huge fuzzy oval leaves, rough bark stems and will have deep purple/magenta lacecap flowers. I've also added an Oakleaf Hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*) to my collection. It will have creamy white flowers and in the fall the leaves will turn a striking bronze or red. My Oakleaf is residing in a huge pot and is surrounded by various types of sedums, including Autumn Joy. I can hardly wait to see all the fall color in that area of the garden.

Hydrangeas thrive in partial shade to full sun and are reported to be indicators of soil acidity. Acid soil supposedly makes bluer hydrangeas and alkaline soil reportedly makes pink hydrangeas. If that's true, then what kind of soil makes white hydrangeas? The soil in our garden is definitely on the acid side and we have all three shades of hydrangea. You can often make your hydrangeas change color but more accurately the variety of the breed is what gives it color.

There are several quite sure things I can tell you about hydrangeas though. They thrive in our climate and really don't need lots of fertilizing unless you're growing them for a flower show or some other special purpose. They pretty much thrive on neglect. Flowers grow on old woody stems. That means that when and if you need to prune them be sure to leave some of this year's growth or you won't have flowers next year. Many experts recommend thinning back a third of the plant when you prune. To do this you'll cut the stem back to the ground. Just be sure to leave all the other stems alone to bear flowers next year.

Right now is the perfect time to harvest hydrangea blooms for drying. You can cut the blooms off leaving part of the green stem so the plant can bloom again next year. I've taken an informal poll and those who have the most success drying hydrangeas say put the hydrangea stem in a vase (with about one inch of water). Leave the vase of hydrangeas in a cool place and the water will eventually evaporate leaving the bloom in a dried state. Other gardeners like to cut their stems of hydrangeas and hang the flowers upside down in a cool place to dry. Try both ways and see what works best.

Each year I plan to try the vase method but end up leaving the blossoms on the bush. I love watching them turn several different shades (like a kaleidoscope) as the seasons change from summer to fall to winter and finally into spring again. Then in early spring I cut off the old dead blossoms and wait for all the new growth again. Maybe this fall or next spring you'll find a spot in your gardens for a few hydrangeas to delight you.

Don't forget the Summer Splendor Garden Tour August 5 and 6 in Silverdale benefitting the Clear Creek Trail. Call the Silverdale Chamber of Commerce for details. Another not to be missed event is the second annual Olympic Pond and Koi Club Water Garden Tour on Saturday August 5 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. tickets are five dollars for adults and children under 18 are free. Kids must be supervised because some of the ponds are very deep. Call Roadhouse Nursery at 360-779-9589 for information and tickets. The tour has ten ponds varying from a hundred gallon pond up to more than 20,000 gallons. Roadhouse Nursery and Clearcreek Nursery will be selling tickets the day of the tour.

One last thing before we end today's column – don't forget to take your extra produce to the local food bank nearest you. Call Fishline in Poulsbo at 779-5190 and they'll tell you where to take your produce.

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