

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 10-26-05) Hydrangeas © 2005

Hydrangeas splash autumn with flashes of color providing abundant choices to decorate your gardens with four-season color. I thought you might want a peek into my garden. I'll tell you about the hydrangeas festooning my garden and why I love them and then you can choose your own favorites to enhance your garden.

*Hydrangea quercifolia* (oakleaf hydrangea) is a tall fairly narrow but sometimes floppy plant with large oak shaped leaves turning purple, amber, orange and claret red in fall. Over time this shrub can reach six to eight feet. Elongated white flowers turn various shades of purple and magenta as they age. Textured bark adds even more interest.

*Hydrangea aspera* can grow into a small ten to twelve foot tree as wide as it is tall. Give it plenty of room to sprawl. Leaves are very large ovals covered with a velvety coat. Flower clusters have mostly fertile flowers with sprinklings of sterile flowers around the edges. Flowers can be white, pink, mauve and lavender. Emerging buds and opening flowers are sheathed in velvet. This is a plant you'll want to pet each time you pass by.

*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'Harlequin' is a two-year-old addition to my garden. It's quite interesting because flowers are pink with a white rim. It's as if someone took a paintbrush and applied a white edging to all the flowers. This plant sits in a corner of our garden waiting to greet me when I drive down our road on the way home from work.

I think one of the reasons we bought our house twelve years ago was a huge blue hydrangea at the corner of our driveway. It's a mophead with flowers that change from green to blue to deep purple to crimson. I also love how the blossoms become pale and papery as the weather chills. The faded parchment blossoms on bare wheat colored stems add interest all winter long.

We also have several lace cap hydrangeas. One has variegated leaves (and no name). I rescued it from the sale bin of our local grocery store about ten years ago. Two of our lace caps are blue and two are white. The variegated variety is white. I've also tucked a few pink and blue mopheads here and there throughout the garden. It's amazing how they can start out so compactly and then end up about five to six feet tall.

*Hydrangea seratta* 'Preziosa' is one of my all time favorites and I, of course, had to have it in my garden. The smooth stems are deepest burgundy. Leaves are darkest forest green. Flowers are small rounded mopheads ranging from palest pink to palest lavender with multicolors all on the same plant. As the season progresses the flowers and leaves deepen in intensity becoming deep rich merlot. When you see *H. seratta* 'Preziosa' you'll want it too.

Are you tempted to add a hydrangea or two to your garden? For more information find "Hydrangeas – A Gardeners Guide" revised edition by Toni Lawson-Hall and Brian Rothera (Timber Press). "Hydrangeas" by Daria Price Bowman (Friedman/Fairfax) is a great pictorial book with colorful photos on every page. Hydrangeas Plus Nursery in

Oregon has an informative website and you can subscribe for their email newsletter or look through the newsletter archives online for hydrangea lore and information. The American Hydrangea Society is [www.americanhydrangeasociety.org](http://www.americanhydrangeasociety.org). Also try [www.hydrangeashydrangeas.com](http://www.hydrangeashydrangeas.com) maintained by horticulturist Judith King.

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