

FINDING THE RIGHT LOCATION TO PLANT

OK you have heard all the interesting information on the various varieties of hydrangea out there and what grows well here in our lovely valley.....now what?

Well, you check out your yard and look for the ideal location to plant one of these amazing specimens!

Hydrangeas grow the best in well drained soil with morning and/or filtered late afternoon sun. They benefit from some shade, especially in the heat of the summer but will need at least 3-4 hrs. of sunlight to thrive. Hydrangeas planted in deep shade will be short on blooms and tend to languish. Some hydrangea family members, the Paniculata pan-ic-u-lata) in particular (remember those are the ones with long, somewhat cone shaped blossoms) can tolerate more sun than others in the family. Providing abundant, regular watering will help considerably with the sun tolerance of any Hydrangea. As they won't be suffering from water stress as well as too much sunlight.

Do the research and find out just where the sunlight falls (Noble's sun location formula) Locate the various microclimates that are available in your yard. A microclimate is a space that otherwise might not be suitable for your needs but because of a fence; a south facing wall etc. could just fit the bill.

I have created a overhead view of a hypothetical typical housing tract lot. Note the location of due North and what that means in terms of where the sun will rise and set. The entire lot is enclosed in a 6' fence and there are various trees planted throughout the lot. The purple splats represent hydrangeas placed in the landscape. (describe each location and why) (remember abt planting under trees) Mention container planting & use of umbrellas.....take example

HOW TO PLANT

So you've made you decision both on which hydrangeas to plant and where to locate them. Now, let's plant them correctly.

-Dig a hole at least twice the diameter of the pot/root ball and only as deep as the height of the container.

-amend the soil several feet out from the hole in all directions and 6-8" deep

-If you are working with heavy clay soil mix in $\frac{1}{3}$ compost to loosen up the soil in the area.

-Many times purchased plants will be root bound (roots wrapped around and around in the pot). Be sure to cut into these roots to release them so they can freely grow into the surrounding area. It may be necessary to cut out and remove some of the root mass if the roots are extremely compacted.

-Set the root ball into your hole. Remember we said to only dig it as deep as the container. That is because you want to rest the bottom of the root mass directly on the native soil allowing the base of the plant to end up above the edge of the hole by about an inch. You have released the roots and they will tend to go outwards into the amended

soil rather than down into the hard native soil. This will allow the plant to anchor itself properly.

-Now you backfill using $\frac{2}{3}$ native soil to $\frac{1}{3}$ compost mixture. Make sure to tamp down around the plant and water well. This gets rid of any air pockets and settles the plant in place.

-Recheck the base of the plant to make sure it is sitting about 1 inch up from the surface of the soil and that the surface slopes away from the plant. This assures that water will not pool around the base of the plant.

Watering recommendations:

-You can create a berm about 8 inches out from the plant to make a reservoir for water. Make sure, again, that the plant is still higher than the surrounding soil and that the soil slopes down to the berm.

-run a drip line w/emitters twice around the base of the plant about 6-8 inches out. Hydrangeas are considered thirsty but the correct location and careful mulching can help considerably in reducing their water needs.

-Don't assume that the plant needs water if it is wilted during the afternoon heat. Hydrangeas are noted for this as their leaves are so large that they lose moisture faster than the plant can resupply from the soil. Always check soil's moisture level before watering to avoid overwatering. Most of the time the plant will re-hydrate on its own when the sun goes down.

FERTILIZATION & WATERING CARE

Now for the fertilization of your Hydrangeas. For the most part if, as I pointed out, you have chosen the correct location Hydrangeas are pretty laid back.

-first and foremost ALWAYS hydrate your plants before fertilization. If you fail to do so the thirsty plant will absorb the harsh fertilizer too quickly and damage their roots in the process. Rather like drinking a soda too fast. If they are hydrated the plant will just 'sip' the fertilizer slowly.

-It is always better to error on the side of not enough fertilizer rather than too much fertilizer.

-It is important to make sure to leave about 5 inches out from the base of the plant free of any fertilizer. Sprinkle/distribute fertilizer from 5 inches out to the drip line of the plant.

-Organic fertilizers like compost and/or manure are the option I prefer. Organic doesn't have near the 'burn' problem & I feel virtuous in that I'm feeding my plants as well as the surrounding soil. The only drawback is that Organic fertilizers need to be reapplied 2-3 times a year.

-Chemical fertilizers are longer lasting so don't need to be reapplied as often. Use a time-release formulated for trees and shrubs once a year. A less expensive 10-10-10 applied twice a year, once in the early spring and once in late summer will also work. Make sure it is covered with a light dusting of soil for it to work properly & always follow pkg directions

-If you use liquid fertilizers they should be applied every month to both container and in ground plants

-It should be noted that if your hydrangea isn't blooming fertilization is not the answer. In fact if your plant looks peaked at all avoid fertilization until you have discovered the cause (insect/disease/mineral deficiency) as fertilizing will only create more plant stress. Do not fertilize at all from late August and until after the last frost. The plant is winding down for the winter and new shoots caused by the fertilization will not survive the winter. -The leaf in this picture is not a fertilization problem but rather an indication of an Iron deficiency or that the iron is unavailable to the hydrangea. A liquid Iron supplement is easy to apply.....again follow directions on pkg.

One of the fun things I learned about hydrangeas is that it is possible to actually change the color of the blossoms on some of the hydrangeas.

-How many of you believe this can be accomplished by fertilization.....?

HOW TO CHANGE THE COLOR OF HYDRANGEA BLOSSOMS

It actually has nothing at all to do with fertilization but rather the pH balance of the soil. True some of the ingredients of the fertilizers may affect the color but not the fertilization itself. Just how do you accomplish this.....?

-For blue flowers you will need an acidic soil

-For pink flowers alkaline soil

Keep in mind that not all hydrangeas color is affected by the pH in the soil. Peegee (paniculata pan-ic-u-lata) & Oak leaf (quercifolia kwer-sih-FOE-lee-uh) are two. If you have a white hydrangea.....you have a white hydrangea, period.

-To achieve blue hydrangea flowers: Increase acidity by soaking the soil with ¼ cup aluminum sulfate dissolved in a gallon of water at weekly intervals in spring and fall.

-to achieve pink Hydrangea flowers: make soil more alkaline by applying lime once or twice a year at the rate of 1 pound per 10 square feet.

(handout to follow)

-The blossom shown here that is half and half is very common on an untreated hydrangea that is just adjusting to it's natural environment.

-It is also possible to achieve a deep purple blossom by riding the fence so to speak or staying right in the middle between acidic and alkaline soil. Keep in mind you must start out with a deep pink or a deep blue bloom to achieve the deep purple. The lighter pink and blue blossoms will only turn lavender.

Note the following:

-It is much easier to change a hydrangea from pink to blue than it is from blue to pink. Changing a hydrangea from pink to blue entails adding aluminum to the soil. Changing from blue to pink means subtracting aluminum from the soil or taking it out of reach of the hydrangea.

-Container plants are better candidates for this process as they are in a controlled environment and the soil is not subject to any outside influences.

