

from the Bedford Extension Master Gardener
HELP DESK

Betsy B., Bedford Extension Master Gardener Volunteer; Help Desk Co-coordinator
A Bedford Area Master Gardeners Association (BAMGA) Publication
August 2017

Pruning Hydrangeas

During August, a client wanted to know whether now was the correct time to prune hydrangea bushes. The type of hydrangea was not known.

DIAGNOSIS / RECOMMENDATION

While this question came in in August, the proper timing of pruning really depends on knowing the type of hydrangea, spring blooming or summer blooming. Regardless of type, however, August through December is not an appropriate time to prune hydrangeas. [1]



Hydrangea macrophylla, variety unknown

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

There are several different types of hydrangea. Smooth hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) is a Virginia native species and is found in many gardens. It blooms on new spring growth, and pruning should be done in the early Spring. [2] In contrast, Oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*), a native to Georgia to Mississippi, blooms on the previous year's growth. Bigleaf hydrangea (*H. macrophylla*) also bloom on last year's growth; this includes both mophead and lacecap types. For types blooming on last year's growth, late year or early Spring pruning will remove all the blooms for the year. These types should be pruned in June or July once blooming is over. [2, 3]

There are some ever-blooming varieties of Bigleaf hydrangeas that actually bloom on both new and old wood; care still is needed to avoid removing the blooms for the current year. [2, 4]

It really is not necessary to prune hydrangeas at all, and that may be a better option than pruning improperly. A simplified approach, suitable for all types of hydrangeas, is to limit pruning to:

- **“Winter-killed wood** — Remove all dead branches in the spring before or as the buds are opening. Test the stem for life by scraping the bark with a knife. If it’s not green underneath, it’s dead and should be removed.
- **Rejuvenation** — Old wood dies back on even the healthiest hydrangeas. In the early spring remove dead or very old stems by cutting them at the base of the plant. This will stimulate new growth and produce a more vigorous bloom set later in the summer.
- **Dead flowers** —Removal of old dried flowers, known as dead-heading, is the safest pruning and can’t be done incorrectly.” [4]

Pruning can be helpful in ensuring good health of the plant, including improving air circulation to help minimize disease problems. [2, 4] It is important to be sure of the type of hydrangea and then to prune only during the proper times of year. [1]

PHOTO from Bedford Extension Master Gardener KathyN’s garden

RESOURCE LINKS

[1] <https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/430/430-462/430-462.html>

[2] http://chesapeake.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/chesapeake_ext_vt_edu/files/pruning-hydrangeas.pdf

[3] <https://macon.ces.ncsu.edu/2017/04/pruning-hydrangeas/>

[4] https://extension.umd.edu/sites/extension.umd.edu/files/docs/programs/hgic/HGIC_Pubs/HG%20106_Pruning_hydrangea_guide.pdf

All resource links accessed July 16, 2017

Answers provided herein were based on specific situations and growing conditions.

These recommendations may or may not be appropriate for all circumstances.

For specific recommendations for your particular situation please contact your local Cooperative Extension Office.

MASTER GARDENER HELP DESK

Bedford County Extension Office: (540) 586-7675 / Email: BedfordMG@vt.edu

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. An equal opportunity affirmative action employer. If you are a person with a disability and desire assistance or accommodation, please notify Scott Baker at the Bedford Extension Office at 540-586-7675 (TDD number 800-828-1120) during business hours of 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.