



Newton Le Willows Gardeners' Association

PRUNING HYDRANGES

The most commonly grown hydrangeas in gardens are lacecaps and mopheads - *Hydrangea macrophylla* types. Mopheads are identified by their full, roundish heads of large petals; lacecaps have tiny flowers in the centre of the bloom and an outer border of large petals.

This family of *Hydrangeas* flower in mid to late summer on flowering shoots that were made the previous year. Mophead and lacecap hydrangeas will bloom satisfactorily with little attention, but regular pruning at the right time will encourage new, vigorous growth that can produce a better display. Likewise, other species, including the climbing hydrangea, will benefit from a trim.



Most pruning can be carried out in late winter or early spring. However the climbing hydrangea is pruned after flowering in summer. Dead blooms on mophead hydrangeas can be removed just after flowering, but it is best to leave them on the plant over winter to provide some frost protection for the tender growth buds below. Lacecaps are hardier, and the faded flower heads can be cut back after flowering to the second pair of leaves below the head in order to prevent seed developing, which saps energy from the plant.

Pruning established mopheads and lacecaps

Remove the dead flower heads in early spring, cutting back to the first strong, healthy pair of buds lower down the stem below the old flower head. Cut out one or two of the oldest stems at the base to encourage the production of new replacement growth that will usually produce larger flower heads.

Poor or neglected plants can be entirely renovated by cutting off all the stems at the base. However, this will remove all the flowers for that summer, and the new stems will not bloom until the following year.

If there is any frost damage in spring, prune back damaged shoots to just above the first undamaged pair of buds on live, healthy wood. Also remove any weak, straggly stems. In particular, cut out any stems that trail onto the ground.



Pruning climbing Hydrangeas

The climbing hydrangea should have overlong shoots cut back immediately after flowering. Most flowers appear towards the top of the plant, so try to leave as much of this un-pruned as possible. Established plants will tolerate hard pruning in spring, but extensive cutting back all in one go is likely to reduce flowering for the next couple of summers. To prevent flower loss, stagger drastic pruning over three or four years, reducing the size of the plant gradually.