

"Hydrangeas are—oh—so—grand— they peer through wrought-iron gates and pose in rows on terraces of millionaires' estates. So elegant and stylish collected, calm and cool— but they're really common snowballs that have been to boarding school."  
-L. Young Correthers



I love hydrangeas. I adore them. They tolerate our heat, our clay and with good drainage they tolerate our wet winters. They come in different shapes and sizes and they fill various niches in space and bloom time. They are opulent. They are show offs. And they are hard working. I admire that. I work too hard to coddle fussy plants.

The '**FRENCH HYDRANGEAS**' (HYDRANGEA MACROPHYLLA), those big showy blue and pink snowballs, are sooo desireable and soooo often dissappointing. These girls are easily fooled by a few lucious spring days every February and March, and then comes our inevitable cold snaps to burn their tender buds. I have counted only 5 of the twenty years I have studied my garden and the gardens of others, that they have bloomed. Yes there are some exceptions... but I want blooms.

Fret not The '**JAPANESE MOUNTAIN HYDRANGEAS**' (HYDRANGEA SERRATA) are hale and hardy. Bud hardy yet very feminine. High maintenance? Not these ladies. In 10 years they have bloomed every year for everyone I have planted. They remain dormant longer and avoid late frosts. Generally they are somewhat smaller than the H. macrophylla.

They are blue, purple, pink and white, mophead and lacecap and even like containers. Some of the desireable varieties available include, '*Blue Billow*'-iridescent blue lacecap, '*Blue Deckle*'-light blue, '*Purple Tiers*'-yep! purple., '*Vetchii*'-white lacecap with a halo of blue to pink. Also '*Pretty Maiden*'-pink lacecap. These hydrangeas are an excellent choice for our area and I will list sources below.

Like their 'French' cousins they like good drainage, good soil and water and fertilizer. But you dont have to hover over them. Just plant them well to begin with and water 1" a week. Give them acidity, (sulpher) for better blue's and alkalinity, (lime) for more pinks. Don't trim them. Just cut yourself some boquet's. Do yourself a favor...grow some of these *HYDRANGEA SERRATA*. You don't have 15 years to waste.

## Lets look at some other varieties.

### HYDRANGEA ARBORESCENS - '**SMOOTH HYDRANGEA**'

This humble woodland creature, native in Shelby county and surrounds, is bashful and hard working. Found on shady north slopes she is absolutely drouth tolerant. Lace cap flowers similar to "Queen Anne's lace". Waist high and as wide. Shade or morning sun.

### HYDRANGEA ARBORESCENS VAR. ANNABELLE - '**ANNABELLE HYDRANGEA**'

Oh Annabelle! Love this little tart. Flowers remind one of ohhhh, Dolly Parton. And a fine southern girl at that. Hardy, robust, opulent. She pretends to be demure. Large 5x5'. Large white flower heads. Absolutely reliable. I cut mine to the ground every Valentines day. They seem to benefit from this. Morning sun and afternoon shade is best. Or North or East foudation planting. Flowers on new wood.

### HYDRANGEA QUERCIFOLIA - '**OAKLEAF HYDRANGEA**'

Conical white blooms fade to pink and then brown. Shaggy bark, large foliage turns brilliant burgundy in fall. Absolutely architectural and no garden should be without them. Native to the south and God really had a plan when she made these girls. Not only is she beautiful she makes the other plants look good too. Now that's a Southern Lady. 'Snow Queen' hold her flowers upright, and 'Snowflake' tumbles nicely, cascading. Use them both. There are many new varieties.

Proper planting is critical for the oakleaf. Well drained and fertile. When in doubt in our area PLANT HIGH, or raise your beds.

### HYDRANGEA PANICULATA-'**P.G. HYDRANGEA**'

Not to be over looked. It can tolerate our blistering sun unlike any other hydrangea. It is also woody and can be pruned to a standard, (like a crepe myrtle) and its top will cascade. Can get as tall as 10-15 ft. I love them as a formal entrance, an arch or corner specimins. They require judicious pruning to give them a tree form. Sun to part shade. Not picky about soil, but good drainage is best. Flowers on new wood so you can't ruin them with busy clippers. White blooms fade to pink and brown.

### HYDRANGEA PANICULATA VAR. TARDIVA-'**TARDIVA HYDRANGEA**'

Like above only totally vertical and big big big. So much like a crepe myrtle that I prefer P.G. HYDRANGEA for variety.

### HYDRANGEA ANOMALA SUBSP. PETIORLARIS-'**CLIMBING HYDRANGEA**'

Yep! Wow! Climbing hydrangea. Very refined, very manageable. Takes 3 years to really get going. Shade, tree trunk, north or east wall. White, fragrant lacecap flowers. Grows to 30 ft. Slowly. You need one. Grow a clematis among it's woody brances on an east wall.

Im sure many of you already are familiar with these ladies and I hope only to inform the novices. Also to praise and promote the use of *HYDRANGEA SERRATA* for those blue hydrangea blue's.

Diane Meucci, gardensoyvey.com

## SOURCES FOR HYDRANGEA SERATTA

Diane Meucci at [www.gardensoyvey.com](http://www.gardensoyvey.com) 901-867-8367

*Blue Billow*, *Blue Deckle*, *Purple Tiers* and *Vetchii*.

Shipped bare root online or by appointment at my private nursery.

For design consulting email me at [diane@gardensoyvey.com](mailto:diane@gardensoyvey.com)

Wilkerson Gardens at [www.hydrangea.com](http://www.hydrangea.com) 770-463-2406

## A Nursery Inside A Garden

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