

Greetings again from GardensOyVey

We started an article series two weeks ago about Hydrangeas. In the first newsletter we talked about *Hydrangea serrata* and *Hydrangea macrophylla* as these are the first to bloom here in zone 7 in the Mid South. They are in Full Bloom and Color This Weekend. If you missed the first one get it here.

This newsletter we will discuss *Hydrangea quercifolia* commonly known as Oak Leaf Hydrangea and *Hydrangea arborescens* sometimes called Smooth Hydrangea. This year the Oak Leaf Hydrangea are blooming With the Serrata and the Macrophylla. The Arborescens Hydrangea are budding now in mid season of the Serrata and Macrophylla to pick up and shine as they begin to fade. I believe this is how they behave in most years.

In the next newsletter I will write about Panicle Hydrangeas which will begin blooming Mid June? and continue into July. As you can see if you mix these species you can have a long season of bloom.

Another Design Consideration is that all of these have different sizes and shapes which serve different niches and create interesting vertical and horizontal arrangements.

Example: Panicle Hydrangea can be pruned up like Crepe Myrtles and you can plant Dwarf Serrata at their feet in afternoon shade, for a sweet little arrangement, or big bosomy Annabelle for a dramatic sun tolerant hedge. Another possibility would be to punctuate a bed every 8-12 ft. with Panicle Hydrangea (vertical) then add an Oak Leaf far left and far right. (Dramatic filler with fab foliage).

In between each Panicle Hydrangea, fill with a mophead, a lacecap, and a dwarf lacecap, mophead or star form Serrata of complimentary colors. Perhaps shades of blue or shades of pink, white and red.

Arrange the sizes and forms to create clockwise and counterclockwise sweeps towards the middle. Plant the middle with Annabelle, Hayes Starburst, or White Dome. (Arborescens.) Wow!

So FINALLY let's talk about Oak Leaf and Arborescens Hydrangea.

Both Oak Leaf and Arborescens are Native to the Southeastern United States. Both are most often found on Dry, Shady Slopes in Native Populations. Both are extremely drought tolerant. Although Arborescens goes in to early dormancy in very dry years without irrigation. Both of them HATE a deep, rich, wet hole. (Remember we are a rain forest in the winter...44 inches and a desert, most years, in the summer...under 6 inches.)

After killing about 30 myself I visited the Big Hill Pond State Park near Pocahtontas, TN. I noticed (in August) that they were living on a slope of about 45 degrees. Very steep. Eureka! They must have good drainage! So I religiously began adding 4 inches of pine bark to 4 inches of native soil (clay) and building raised planting hills for Oak Leaf and Arborescens. Since then I have not lost any. The Oak Leaf Hydrangea are perhaps the most refined of all Hydrangea. They have fantastic foliage, brilliant white flowers, excellent fall color, and interesting exfoliating bark for winter. They average 4-6 ft. in height and 4 ft. in spread. There are also selections which are Dwarf, 2-3 ft. (Pee Wee) and Giants that go 8-12 ft. (Alice). There are Vertical Forms (Snow Queen) and Weeping Forms (Snowflake), as well as fragrant (Ellen Huff). They again are drought tolerant, and prefer shade or morning sun and zones 5-9.

I believe that their foliage is essential to a shade garden as it is large and bold and anchors the landscape. Arborescens Hydrangea is not to be overlooked. When we purchased our 5 acres the native plants were choked by Chinese Honeysuckle and Privet. Once we eradicated these vicious pests the native plants slowly began to emerge again from the forest floor. Red Buckeye, Dogwood and Redbud, Christmas Fern, Wood Phlox and Hydrangea Arborescens. Hydrangea Arborescens is perhaps most familiar to us all as 'Annabelle'. I would like to also introduce to you 'Hayes Starburst' and 'White Dome'.

Hydrangea Arborescens is robust and bosomy as 'Annabelle' (Huge Mopheads), and refined and demure as 'White Dome' (subtle lace caps). 'Hayes Starburst' is a variation in between with double star sterile inflorescence. I cant imagine a Southern Garden or any Garden within zones 4-9 without 'Annabelle'. While she may be showy...she has a subtle dignity. She is Drought Tolerant, Sun Tolerant and requires a well drained planting hill. She is 5x5 ft. but benefits from an annual shearing TO THE GROUND each Valentines Day.

She repays you with more flowers and smaller size shrub. (4 ft.?) **DO NOT DO THIS TO ANY OTHER HYDRANGEA!** 'Annabelle' has unfortunate ankles so underplant her with Deciduous Southern Shield Fern (*Thelypteris kunthii*) or Autumn Fern.

I think 'Hayes Starburst' will be an exciting selection. We will see this year as they are maturing in our Gardens and our containers. A dry shade woodland garden would not be complete without 'White Dome' or the species arborescens lacecap for its' subtle beauty and place in our southern ecosystems.

Finally try to place the right hydrangea in the right place. This will release you from the necessity of shearing. If you must shear, do it immediatly after they bloom for most hydrangea.

However Arborescens and Panicle bloom on new wood which is forgiving of mistakes. The Panicles are best limbed up 30 to 50 percent from the ground up.

I am sure I have missed something. Perhaps I can address all my mistakes in a separate article. That will be one very long article.

Best Wishes. Diane and Wolfgang. GardensOyVey

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