

# HYDRANGEAS

**H**YDRANGEAS must be given pride of place among flowering shrubs in all except the coldest districts of New Zealand. There are few other garden shrubs which will flower for so long each year, make such a bright display, flower as such young bushes, succeed in such diverse situations, or have so few diseases and pests. Hydrangeas are easy to grow, but some points often overlooked are mentioned in this article by J. P. Hudson, Horticulturist, Wellington.

**H**YDRANGEAS have been cultivated for centuries in Japan and China, and improved garden forms are said to have been introduced to Kew, England, from Japan in 1790, long before the natural wild species was discovered, through a Dutch firm which was permitted to maintain a trading firm at Nagasaki.

The plant has since earned great popularity both as a pot plant for indoor decoration and as a garden shrub in districts which are not subject to severe frosts in winter. It has found great favour in New Zealand, especially in the coastal regions, where it grows with the greatest luxuriance. Unfortunately many gardeners have planted the common white varieties, which have rather a funereal look. Many of the newer varieties are far brighter and more desirable, providing welcome and unusual colour displays for long periods each year.

## Soil and Situation

One of the main reasons why hydrangeas have become so popular is that they can be grown in a very wide range of soils and situations, though they do better in some than in others. A rich, well-drained, loamy soil which does not dry out produces the largest bushes and finest blooms. A constant supply of moisture at the roots is necessary if growth is to continue unchecked through the season. Hydrangeas growing in light, sandy soil suffer in dry weather unless special attention is given to watering and mulching. On the other hand, soils which lie very wet in winter are not suitable, as the roots are injured if the soil is waterlogged for any length of time.

[There is much confusion about the nomenclature of the common garden hydrangea which should be known as *Hydrangea macrophylla* Thunb, but is usually listed as *H. hortensis* Smith, *H. hortensis* Sieb, or *H. opuloides* C. Koch.]



The hydrangea is hardier than is commonly supposed, and will grow outside in all but the coldest places in the Dominion. Hard frosts may cause the shoots to die back, leading to loss of the buds which should have flowered in the following season, but it is unusual for bushes to be killed outright by frost unless the ground freezes hard.

**The hydrangea is accommodating in its choice of situation, growing in full sun or heavy shade, but it probably comes nearest perfection in partial shade. It will also stand wind better than many broad-leaved deciduous shrubs, but does best where it is sheltered to some extent from bitterly cold winds in winter and hot, searing winds in summer.**

Hydrangeas will do quite well in shaded corners, between houses, and in other closed-in places where little else will grow, though the best flowers are not usually produced in such situations. That is chiefly because corners overshadowed by buildings often receive much less than their full allotment of rainfall, and are apt to dry out completely in summer. Timely soaking with water and liquid manure will do much to help plants growing in odd corners and passages.

## Fertilisers and Mulch

Each bush should be given an annual spring topdressing of 2 or 3 handfuls of blood and bone, scattered on the surface round the plant to cover a circle of soil about the same diameter as the bush. The surface of the soil should then be lightly pricked over with a fork, taking care not to injure the roots, many of which lie near the surface.

In the early summer the surface of the soil around the bushes should be mulched with a layer of well-rotted animal manure, compost, or leaves to conserve the moisture in the earth and prevent the sun's rays from beating directly on the surface of the soil. The mulch also reduces the risk of the soil cracking, which may lead to the roots being seriously injured.

In high summer an occasional topdressing of complete fertiliser thoroughly watered in, or generous applications of liquid manure, will help to keep the bushes growing strongly and ensure healthy new shoots as well as a long succession of flowers during the season. Liquid manure can be made by half filling a sack with animal manure and suspending it in a tub of water. The liquid, which soon becomes dark brown, should be diluted with water to the colour of tea before it is watered on to the soil around the plants.

## Rainfall and Watering

Rainfall is not evenly distributed on the soil of a shrubbery. The arrangement of the leaves is such that rain drips from leaf to leaf and often tends to fall more on one spot than another. A high proportion of the rain may be diverted to one area while other places remain relatively dry, even after heavy rain. Moreover, the total rainfall absorbed by the soil in a shrubbery is less than in open ground, as much of the rain, especially when it falls in showers, remains on the leaves and branches to dry off when the weather clears without reaching the ground at all.

These points should be borne in mind where hydrangeas are growing in the shelter of hedges and near