

## Oak Leaf Hydrangea

Species: *H. Quercifolia* (kwer-sih-FOE-lee-uh) which is commonly known as Oakleaf hydrangea.

The Oakleaf Hydrangea is one of the few hydrangeas native to the United States and is native to the southeastern part of our country. It is so named because its leaves are deeply lobed, resembling those of the Northern Red Oak tree.

The oakleaf hydrangea is a coarse-textured deciduous shrub. Deciduous means a plant sheds its leaves in the fall or winter. They generally grow to about 6 – 7 feet tall and about the same width. As the plant matures season to season, it will produce sprouts from underground stolons. Young stems are covered in soft, light brown bark and the larger, older stems have cinnamon colored bark. The older bark shreds and peels in thin flakes.

The leaves of this plant are different from the rest of the hydrangea genus. They are thick, coarse, serrated and bristled with tiny hairs and have downy white undersides. They have 3, 5 or 7 pointed lobes and are almost as long as they are wide. Interestingly, the thickness and hairiness aid in the plant's moisture retention and gives it the ability to coexist in our gardens with low-water Mediterranean and California native plants. Plants grown in shade have larger leaves than those grown in sun. This can be an excellent addition to your landscape based on our climate.

Another interesting fact is that the flowers are borne in what is called a panicle, which is a many branched cluster of flowers and look cone shaped. The flowers start out white and are stunning and long lasting. They fade to a soft, rusty pink as they age. Another difference with this hydrangea compared to others you have heard about is its behavior in fall and winter. In addition to the flowers changing color, in fall, the leaves change colors from red to purple to bronze. It is technically deciduous, but it holds its leaves into early winter and when they drop, the bare shrub is quite showy with rusty, peeling branches and stems. This is one of the hydrangeas whose flowers produce on old wood and set their flower buds for the next year in early fall. If you do any pruning to shape or size the plant, do so right after blooming is finished. In our area, prune by the end of July or early August. Again, this is one that blooms on old wood. So – don't cut this back in winter like you would most of the other hydrangeas you have heard or will hear about today or you won't get the growth or blooms that they are capable of giving.

It grows best in more of a woodland habitat, preferring partial to almost full shade with morning sun. It prefers slightly acidic soils with a pH of 5.0 – 6.5. It will tolerate drought, but may not flower. This is not the type of hydrangea whose flowers will change color with the addition of acidic material.

### Varietals:

In choosing a varietal, one key to think about is what size will work in your garden. Some stay in the 4 – 6 foot range and some will reach 15 feet. There are also two blossom types, single

and double blossom. Here are a few popular varieties depending on what you need for your garden.

Dwarf: Ruby Slippers and Munchkin and also Skies dwarf; 4 ft tall

Medium: Snowflake(double blossom) these have a longer blooming season than single varieties. and Snow Queen; 8 feet tall

Large: Alice, Allison, Harmony(double blossom): 10 – 12 feet tall.

Oakleaf are planted individually in areas that allow for their growth. These get quite large over time and can be used as anchor plants in various areas of the landscape. People either love or hate this type. Its double blooms are very large and cause the blooms to droop. They are very full but beautiful as they droop. So again – it is a personal preference as to what you like.

## Pee Gee Hydrangea

Species: *H. paniculata* (hy-DRAIN-jah pah-nik-yew-Lay-tah)

This species, in contrast to the oakleaf which is native to the United States, is a flowering plant native to southern and eastern China, Korea, Japan and Russia. It was first formally described by Philipp Franz von Siebold in 1829. It is a deciduous shrub or and one of the few hydrangeas that can be grown as a small tree. Depending on the variety, it grows from 4 to 20 feet tall and can spread 8 to 15 feet. This particular variety can be used in many landscape plans. It can be used individually but can also be used to provide hedges throughout your landscape.

This plant produces gracefully arching branches. The leaves are broadly oval, toothed and 3 to 6 inches long. In late summer it bears large, conical panicles of creamy white flowers with pinkish white florets. Like the oakleaf hydrangea, the flowers are equally stunning and turn pink tinged and then purple.

Grow this in moist, but well drained soil. It does need several hours of sun to do well and is a fast grower. In fact, compared to other hydrangeas, it is one variety that can take more sun, which is a plus for our climate. So depending on your micro climate in your yard, this may be one to include. It blooms on the current season's wood. You can cut back to a few buds in spring, which will produce larger flowers. Or it can be allowed to grow with minimal pruning.

### Varieties:

The best known hydrangea paniculata is Pee Gee. It gets its nickname from its botanical name, *H. paniculata* 'Grandiflora' or PG. Pee Gee refers only to the Grandiflora variety, however many nurseries have started referring to all paniculatas as Pee Gee's.

The most common varieties are white. These include Grandiflora and Unique. Some of the new hybrids add color, such as Limelight and Diamond Rouge. Even though their initial color will be, for instance light green, they will still turn pink then purple as they age. The Pee Gee's can be grouped with most other hydrangeas.

Different varieties of hydrangeas grouped together in areas of some sun but mostly shade will

give a spectacular show of color throughout the summer and fall season.