

Hardy hydrangeas

THIS SUMMER FAVORITE COMES IN AN EVER-EXPANDING ARRAY OF VARIETIES THAT CAN THRIVE IN A COLDER CLIMATE.

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These are exciting times for hydrangea lovers. Colored varieties will now bloom in the North where once only white hydrangeas flowered dependably. It started with the blue mophead Endless Summer, a freak of nature found in a Minnesota backyard in the 1980s and made widely available to gardeners less than a decade ago.

Endless Summer touched off a hydrangea hybridizing frenzy that has since produced such colorful, hardy Northern hydrangeas as red and green Pistachio, rose pink Double Delights Perfection, and the blue lacecap Double Delights Star Gazer. There are also new varieties of peegee hydrangeas (the plant's botanical name, *H. paniculata Grandiflora*, is the source of the nickname peegee) that are more colorful and compact than the familiar 20-foot arching shrubs.

Look for Fire and Ice, Limelight, Tardiva, and Little Lamb. One of the newest, called Bombshell, grows only 3 feet tall and flowers from June to frost. It's designed for mass plantings. But Pauline Runkle's longtime favorite hydrangea remains the Annabelle, the mutation of a native *Hydrangea arborescens* (named not for a woman but for the village of Anna, Ohio). It's carefree and looks good all the time.

"In the spring, the flowers are green, in the summer they're white, in the fall they turn green again, and in the winter you can cut the shrub back to the ground for neatness if you want," says Runkle. To get more clones, she simply slices the root ball into quarters with a spade and replants the pieces. (This trick works on most multistemmed shrubs.)

"All these came from one Annabelle," says Runkle, waving to swaths of two dozen 3-foot shrubs bearing hundreds of pristine 10-inch white snowballs.