

Hydrangea Pruning Quick Guide

Do not cut back an unidentified hydrangea in fall just because blooms turned brown-check flowering wood first.

1. FLOWERING-WOOD & PRUNING WINDOW QUICK-REFERENCE TABLE

Hydrangea type	Flowering wood	Usual pruning window	What to avoid
Bigleaf (<i>H. macrophylla</i>)	Old wood	If needed, soon after summer bloom	Fall/winter/spring stem cuts remove buds
Oakleaf (<i>H. quercifolia</i>)	Old wood	Minimal; soon after summer bloom	Hard fall/winter cuts ruin form & bloom
Mountain (<i>H. serrata</i>)	Old wood*	Lightly soon after bloom (*rebloomers vary)	Late-summer or fall stem cutbacks
Panicle (<i>H. paniculata</i>)	New wood	Late winter or early spring before growth	Cutting into trained trunk on tree-forms
Smooth (<i>H. arborescens</i>)	New wood	Late winter or early spring before growth	Heavy pruning during active summer growth
Reblooming cultivars	Old & new	Deadhead spent blooms; spring dead wood	Hard cutbacks that remove early old-wood buds

2. IDENTIFICATION CHECKLIST & "UNKNOWN VARIETY" FALL ADVICE

- ☐ Check nursery tags, plant labels, or receipts first. Never use flower color (pink/blue/white) alone to pick a pruning method.
- ☐ UNKNOWN VARIETY RULE: If you do not know the species or cultivar in autumn, STOP-leave living stems intact and observe next season.
- ☐ DEADHEADING VS. PRUNING: Snip only the spent flower stalk just below the faded head; if unsure where to cut, leave dried blooms on.
- ☐ DORMANT VS. DEAD WOOD: Woody brown stems are not automatically dead. Wait until spring leaf-out confirms which stems failed to wake.
- ☐ NO BLANKET CUTBACKS: Never cut every hydrangea to the ground; on tree-form panicle standards, always preserve the trained trunk.
- ☐ NON-PRUNING BLOOM CHECKS: If an unpruned shrub fails to bloom, check winter cold/frost bud kill, deer browsing, deep shade, or excess nitrogen.

3. RECORD YOUR CULTIVAR & LOCAL SEASONAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Shrub location & cultivar tag:	Bed / exposure: _____ Cultivar / nursery label: _____
2. Leaf, bark & bloom clues:	☐ Glossy toothed (Bigleaf) ☐ Oak-lobed ☐ Cone panicles ☐ Velvety heart-shaped Notes: _____
3. Observed flowering wood:	☐ Old wood (last year stems) ☐ New wood (current spring shoots) ☐ Both (rebloomer) ☐ Unknown (Pause!)
4. Fall action taken:	☐ Left dried blooms for winter ☐ Conservative deadhead only ☐ Paused major cuts until identified
5. Spring leaf-out & bloom notes:	Date leafed out: _____ Dead tips removed: _____ Freeze/deer/shade notes: _____

4. PRIMARY EXTENSION SOURCES (NO AFFILIATE LINKS)

University of Maryland Extension - Pruning Hydrangeas: <https://extension.umd.edu/resource/pruning-hydrangeas>

UMD Extension - Pruning Shrubs and Hedges in the Home Garden: <https://www.extension.umd.edu/resource/pruning-shrubs-and-hedges-home-garden>