



## Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article      December 8, 2015

### **A Plant for All Seasons: Oakleaf Hydrangea**

by Lydia Holley

Are you looking for a shrub that is beautiful, yet different, all four seasons of the year? Then look no farther than *Hydrangea quercifolia*, the oakleaf hydrangea.

Spring comes late with the oakleaf hydrangea. Finally finding little green shoots on previously dormant stems is one of springtime's delights. Afterward, deeply lobed leaves begin to appear. These are the leaves for which the oakleaf hydrangea is named.



Summer brings blooms to the oakleaf hydrangea. Big, gorgeous, glorious, cone-shaped blooms that remind me of tall, swirled ice cream. Their white blooms are a summertime treat and can visually cool a summer garden. These blooms do not stay white, however. They slowly turn to pink, and eventually dry to an antique beige which looks like old lace. These blooms can be cut at any stage of color and brought inside for a stunning arrangement.

Want something a little more colorful? There are cultivars that have red blooms. And while most oakleaf hydrangeas have blooms made up of single florets, there are some that have double florets. Oakleaf hydrangeas generally get up to eight feet tall and wide, but there are some that will grow up to fifteen feet tall. There are also dwarf cultivars available. This makes it easy to add an oakleaf hydrangea to your garden no matter what size or color fits your particular needs.

Mophead hydrangeas are notorious for needing lots of water, and do best in shade. Oakleaf hydrangeas are different. They can take full sun, although they appreciate some shade in the afternoon. They can also grow well in dappled light or a part shade condition.

Oakleaf hydrangeas also need less water than mopheads. They love moist, sandy soil, but will tolerate dry soil. However, they do not appreciate standing in water. The oakleaf hydrangea is also native to the U.S., in a triangular area from Louisiana to North Carolina, and south to Florida. Although they are not native to Texas, they grow well here.

In autumn, oakleaf hydrangeas warm you with their fiery colors. Their oak shaped leaves turn a dark burgundy red, a golden yellow or flaming orange. Although pruning is not necessary, if you choose to prune your oakleaf hydrangea, early autumn is the time to do it as it blooms on old wood. If you prune too late in the season, you will prune off all of next spring's blooms.

Oakleaf hydrangeas are one of the most versatile plants offered to the gardener. It makes a stunning specimen or accent plant. It looks nice in a garden with mixed plantings. It would be very impressive used as a hedge. You could also use a dwarf cultivar as an interesting and unusual foundation planting.

When winter arrives, your oakleaf hydrangea will lose its leaves in the cold wind. What is left is stems of peeling bark, which creates an interesting winter form. There is no season that the oakleaf hydrangea does not add some sort of beauty or interest to your garden. If you don't have one in your garden, you may want to consider adding this ever-changing, extremely versatile plant which is interesting in every season and can be used in a variety of ways.

*For more information, email [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com) or call 903-675-6130.*