

Living in Nebraska provides the opportunity to experience all four seasons. As I get older, I dislike winter more and more. I long for an endless summer. By the way, a few years ago, I purchased an endless summer. However, the endless summer I purchased was not a seasonal change; rather, it was the name of a plant belonging to the genus *Hydrangea*.

The genus *Hydrangea* consists of nearly seventy species of shrubby plants. Within each species, a plethora of cultivars exists. The cultivar I purchased belongs to the genus/species *Hydrangea macrophylla*.

Macrophylla hydrangea is often referred to as big-leaf hydrangea, divided into mop heads and lace caps. Mop heads have globe-shaped flowers made up of large male flowers; lace caps have flattened flower heads with central, female blossoms ringed in larger, male blossoms. Typically, *macrophylla* were known to bloom only on old wood (previous season's growth). A little over a decade ago, Baily Nursery in Newport, Minnesota, developed a series of *macrophylla* hydrangea called Endless Summer[®], creating a *macrophylla* hydrangea capable of blooming not only on old wood but on new growth as well. Prior to this, if winter conditions were too cold, the flower buds of *macrophylla* rarely survived — thus no blossoms. Furthermore, if a gardener pruned his or her plant in the fall or spring, after the buds had formed, again no blossoms were produced.



Five years ago, Rita and I purchased a cultivar of the Endless Summer series called Twist and Shout[®]. This particular hydrangea is a lace cap variety and is rated for USDA Zones 4-9. Having planted it in our yard in what we thought to be a suitable location, I've been somewhat disappointed with its inability to re-bloom. Most years, it forms a nice-sized plant, but few blossoms are produced. Unfortunately, nearly every winter, the plant dies back to the ground. Perhaps it is not as cold hardy as claimed, or perhaps its lack of hardiness is due to its location in our landscape. This year, I plan to give it winter protection.

Other gardeners have informed me their Endless Summer® hydrangeas are not the best at re-blooming. Although cold weather isn't the only challenge for these hydrangeas to re-bloom, other factors can wreak havoc. For example, early cold spells can damage flower buds before they have had a chance to harden off for the winter. Dry winds and winter sun can dry out plant tissue and desiccate the plant. With frozen soil, water replacement cannot offset the loss of water. Alternating freeze/thaw cycles can heave plants out of the ground exposing roots to drying wind and sun. Sometimes midwinter thaws can fool plants into breaking dormancy too early, and tender growth may be killed by the next cold spell.

To help *Hydrangea macrophylla* re-bloom, I offer these suggestions. Avoid pruning. If one removes the old growth, blooms can only appear from new buds. Furthermore, if one's hydrangea appears to be marginally hardy, protect the old growth from the freezing cold. Consider tucking it into a seasonal shelter before cold weather settles in. It doesn't have to be elaborate. Using Styrofoam cones designed to protect tea roses will provide protection. Overturned plastic pots, wrapped in burlap, covered with shredded leaves or even protected with a heavy-duty paper bag should help shield the plant from extreme cold. Mulching around the base of the plant with a two-inch layer of organic mulch after the ground freezes will also minimize damage from the freeze/thaw cycle.

If I can protect my Twist and Shout® hydrangea from this winter's cold, it just might provide me an endless summer of blossoms for 2017. I can only hope that our recent cold spell has not already destroyed last year's growth. One thing I do know for sure, this past sudden cold spell caused me to dislike winter even more.