

Yard and Garden 07-30-2011 Ted Griess / Extension Horticulture Assistant

Living in Nebraska gives one the opportunity to experience the four seasons, something I have always enjoyed. However, as I get older, I am becoming less fond of winter, and often I long for an endless summer. Did you know that we Nebraskans can now experience an endless summer without ever leaving the state? Okay — before you think I have gone entirely daft, allow me to clarify. The endless summer to which I am referring is not a seasonal change; rather it is the name of a series of plants called hydrangea.

Hydrangeas are noted for their large, showy clusters of blue, pink or white flowers that bloom from mid-to-late summer. Hydrangea is the genus name of about seventy species of shrubby plants. Of those seventy, only four species are generally found growing in landscapes throughout the United States. They are *Hydrangea macrophylla*, *Hydrangea arborescens*, *Hydrangea quercifolia* and *Hydrangea paniculata*. Of these four species, a plethora of cultivars exists.

Today, I wish to focus attention only on *Hydrangea macrophylla*. This particular species has been and is still one of the most popular grown. Often referred to as big leaf hydrangea, it is divided into mop heads and lace caps. Mop heads have globe-shaped flowers made up of large male flowers; lace caps have flattened flowerheads with central, female blossoms ringed in larger, male blossoms. I will address the other three species in future columns.

Endless Summer®, a series of hydrangea, was developed and patented by Bailey Nurseries of Newport, Minnesota. This fourth generation wholesale nursery has been providing plants to nursery retailers throughout the United States and Canada for over fifty years. Within the last decade, they developed hydrangea plants which bloom not only on old wood but on new growth as well. Until then, most hydrangeas developed their flower buds only on the previous season's growth. You might be asking yourself, why is this such a great discovery? By such an accomplishment, we gardeners living in Zone 4 can now grow hydrangea capable of blooming continually throughout the summer, thus aptly named Endless Summer®. Prior, if winter conditions were too cold, the flower buds 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 very little blossom, if any, was realized. The first of the Endless Summer® series was released in 2004 and is called the Original Endless Summer with the cultivar name of Bailmer™. Currently there are four patented plants: the Original, the Blushing Bride™, the Twist-and-Shout™ and the Bella Anna™. The first three are patented cultivars belonging to the species *Hydrangea macrophylla* whereas Bella Anna™ is that of the species *Hydrangea arborescens*.

Endless Summer® Bailmer™ is a patented plant, the first of its kind in the hydrangea world. It is the first to be called a repeat bloomer. Bailmer™ produces what the growers call mop head blossoms. These large flower heads are either pink or blue depending upon the soil pH. Because it is capable of flowering repeatedly on new wood, regardless if the plant dies back to the crown



or if pruned at the wrong time, it will richly reward you with remarkable blooms throughout the growing season. Bailmer™ is capable of reaching three to four feet in height. Like most hydrangea it prefers rich, organic, moist soil with good drainage. Morning sun and afternoon shade is the preferred lighting. Feeding the plant

with aluminum sulfate will yield blue blooms; otherwise, due to the alkaline soil in mid-Nebraska, the flowers will be pink.

Endless Summer® Blushing Bride™ is a white-flowering version of the popular original endless summer. Blushing bride has the same dark green leaves and nine-inch mop head flowers. The flowers turn blush or pale sky blue as they age, depending on acidity or alkalinity of the soil. This plant grows three to six feet tall and the same in width. It prefers full sun to partial shade and is hardy from Zones 4 to 8.



Endless Summer® Twist-n-Shout™ is a lace cap hydrangea. It produces abundant blooms on both old and new wood all summer long. Lacy, deep-bluish/pink centers are surrounded by gorgeous blossoms of pink or periwinkle blue, depending on soil type. Sturdy red stems and glossy deep green leaves turn red-burgundy in fall offering year-round interest. Easily cared for, it is hardy to Zone 4. Twist-n-Shout™ is an elegant stand alone specimen yet compact

enough to be grown in containers.

If you, too, are growing tired of winter and long for an endless summer, one option might be choosing to grow any of the Endless Summer® series hydrangeas. You can't go wrong.