

It's March!

By Kathleen Cue, Nebraska Extension Horticulture Educator in Dodge County

Master Gardener Program Update

Nebraska Extension Master Gardener volunteers are awesome. Not only are they the boots on the ground to provide gardening information to others but they engage with members of their communities to make their towns and counties better places to live. They provide gardening expertise and advice to community, school and child-care gardens and they maintain a sharp look-out for problems that can be solved with plants, like fostering insect pollinator health, remediating soil erosion, providing best tree management practices and instilling vegetable gardening skills for the food insecure. Master Gardeners do this through "Ask the Master Gardener" tables, at educational gardens, programs to civic groups and schools and via the horticulture helpline through Nebraska Extension county offices.

The Panicle Hydrangea

The panicle hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata*) gets its name from the huge pyramidal-shaped white flowers it produces. This shrub, introduced to this continent in 1862, originates from China and Japan and easily withstands the winters that the Midwest can throw its way. Unlike the finicky blue-flowered types (*Hydrangea macrophylla*), the panicle hydrangeas produce show-stopping flowers reliably, even after the worst winter. It is hardy to USDA zones 3 through 8.

Panicle hydrangea does best in sun to part-shade locations although it appreciates some protection from afternoon sun. Soil pH is not a concern, as long as it has a good amount of organic matter and drains well. Water during dry spells with one inch of water, applied all in one application, per week.

Older varieties like 'Grandiflora' (the PeeGee hydrangea) and 'Tardiva' have been around for quite some time, but development of new varieties by plant breeders Pieter Zwijnenburg Jr., Tim Wood, Johan Van Huylbroeck, and Jean Renault has brought fresh enthusiasm for the panicle hydrangea:

- Limelight™ boasts white flowers with lime-green sepals. At 8 feet tall and wide, this is a big shrub.
- For smaller yards, Little Lime® is just 5 feet high and wide and flowers develop tones of pink as they age.
- BoBo® is almost completely covered in large rounded panicles of white flowers when in bloom. At just 3 feet tall and 4 feet wide, the strong stems are up to the task of keeping the flowers out of the dirt.
- Pinky Winky® develops 12 inch long panicles of white flowers that mature to pink. It is 6 feet tall and wide.
- Quick Fire® is the earliest to bloom of the panicle hydrangeas. This 6 foot tall by 8 foot wide shrub has white flowers that gradually change to pink and then dark pink.
- Little Quick Fire® has similar flower traits as Quick Fire® but with a smaller stature at 5 feet tall and wide.
- What sets Firelight® apart from other panicle hydrangea varieties is the white flowers that age to vivid red. At 8 feet tall and wide, this is another large shrub.
- Zinfin Doll® develops white flowers that change to pink and then dark pink at maturity. It is 6 feet tall and wide.