



RUISLIP
CENTRAL
HORTICULTURAL
SOCIETY

THE signs of autumn are now beginning to show, the nights are creeping in, the morning dew is arriving and in the late evening the temperature begins to drop significantly.

One of the shrubs in the garden that I always consider to be one of the last summer shows before the garden gives way to winter is the 'Hydrangea'.

When we think of the Hydrangea, we all think of those massive great mop head blooms, that garish blue shouting out and those pink colours that could be used as pompoms at the side of an American Football pitch.

However, there is a lot more to the Hydrangea. It's only when you give them a go in your own garden that you see the world of the hydrangea is a lot different that you first think. I had a very similar opinion of Hydrangeas as I did of Roses, I wasn't taken by those large blooms of which looked sprayed in some cases with blue fluorescent paint!

However, when I was convinced, begrudgingly, by a great friend of mine from Harrogate (Edward Elves, and what he does not know about horticulture you could fit on the back of a postage stamp!.) that I should grow *Hydrangea aspera* Villosa (pictured) next to a wall in my garden by the edge of the steps. It soon became clear to me, after a few seasons that knowledge certainly won over my uneducated palette.

Hydrangea was chosen for the genus name because the plant's fruit has the shape of an antique water vessel. *Hydrangea* is made up from the Greek words *hydor* meaning water, and *angeion* meaning receptacle. The name is a good one for another reason. Hydrangeas consume huge quantities of water, suited to moist, wet however well drained soil. If you have dry, sandy soil forget it!

Hydrangea is both the common and the genus name, and there are 70 to 75 different individual species in the genus *Hydrangea*. Hydrangeas are native to southern and eastern Asia as well as North and South America. *There are quite a few types of Hydrangea, these include:-*

MOPHEAD Globe shaped flower cluster, the most commonly recognised form of *Hydrangea* bloom.

PANICLE Long, somewhat cone-shaped flower cluster (particularly in Oakleaf Hydrangeas, *Hydrangea quercifolia*)

LACECAP Flattened cluster of what appear to be tiny, immature buds surrounded at the edges by typical 4 to 5 petal flowers.

CLIMBING *Hydrangea anomala petiolaris*. Climbing hydrangea is a useful low-maintenance climber for a shady or north wall. Plants are slow to get going, and often make little new growth in the first few years. However, it is well worth the wait. In midsummer the white lacecap-style



Hydrangea aspera Villosa



Hydrangea Annabelle



Hydrangea Quercifolia

hydrangea flowers are huge, up to 10in across, and can almost cover the stems completely.

Hydrangea macrophylla (Mop Head) Flowers are generally blue or pink. The flower colour of some cultivars is affected by the pH of the soil - in acid soil the flowers are blue, in alkaline soil they are pink. These are the type sold by some supermarkets for a quick pot show indoors or on the patio. It is interesting to note that soil chemistry determines the colour of (non-white) hydrangeas! If the soil is highly acidic, the plant can absorb aluminium from the soil to produce blue flowers. In neutral soil, the aluminium cannot be absorbed, and the flowers are pink. By controlling the pH, a range of flower colourations can be produced by growers.

I grow a few varieties in my garden, as I mentioned earlier I have a most spectacular *Hydrangea aspera* Villosa which now is over 10 foot tall and equally as wide with hundreds of flowers on right now. It has become the most talked about plant in my garden over the years. A fantastic show when most flowers are now going over. I also have Annabelle. A great tip with her is to cut her right down to about one or two buds above soil level every March, this will produce the largest magnificent flower heads over a foot across, as pictured above. If you do this however you will need to stake the plant as the heads get very heavy and will droop. Leaving the plant and not cutting back will produce more, however much smaller heads.

Finally if you are one for fantastic Autumn colour, you need to grow *Hydrangea Quercifolia* (Oakleaf Hydrangea) its fantastic display of autumn colours are worth the wait after the show of flowers.

A quiet dip into the world of Hydrangea. Enjoy growing them, they are well worth it.

Next month the mail bag returns. Please email any gardening questions to the RCHS panel at rchstalks@gmail.com

Warren

THE RCHS AUTUMN SHOW - FREE ENTRANCE
Saturday 12th September, 1-4pm
The Great Barn, Ruislip. Floral displays and Refreshments - do come along.

PS. There are a few remaining tickets for the RCHS Fish & Chip Super Quiz on Saturday 17th October, 7pm. Call Warren on 01923 451616 for yours.