

Pruning Mop Head and Lace Cap Hydrangeas

1. Prune in the spring when the plant has begun breaking dormancy. At this time of year you can see which canes are living and which are dead.

2. Begin by removing all dead canes, cutting them down to the ground. This is best accomplished by sitting next to the plant, or by using loppers, so you'll not be tempted to leave a lot of ugly stumps.

3. Once all dead canes are removed, evaluate what is left. If still you have many living stems, and some of them are over three years old, remove a third of those oldest canes, again cutting them at ground level. This will stimulate new growth. If the plant is not congested with a number of older stems, skip this step.

4. Neaten the plant by clipping off any old flowers that remain. Cut remaining canes back by working from the top down, stopping and making the cut just above the first or second pair of buds you come to. Using this top down method, some canes will be cut very little or not at all, while some will have living buds only near the base of the plant so you'll be removing quite a bit of that cane.

5. Next, step back and look at the plant. If there is one stem that is a great deal taller than the rest, clip it to be in scale with the rest if you prefer how that would look. If there are any curvy, weak looking branches that trail on the ground, remove those.

6. Keep in mind that any green buds you remove have the potential to develop flowers later in the summer. Also, once a plant grows to its mature height it will replace the growth in one summer no matter how short you cut it. So the plant you cut down will be just as tall by mid-July and will have fewer flowers. Prune Endless Summer and other big leaf hydrangeas that bloom on new growth in the same way. Cutting them short equals fewer blooms.

Give up on trying to make them shorter.

