



THE WALTON COUNTY GARDENER

by Walton County Master Gardeners Volunteers

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LET'S TALK ABOUT HYDRANGEAS

Andrea M. Schnapp, Walton County Master Gardener Volunteer

You're not paying attention if you haven't noticed the hydrangea explosion this spring. I have some of the best flowers this year! So why are we having such a wonderful hydrangea season? My theory - our cold winter. But, we had a cold winter the year before and our hydrangeas barely made it! That's because we had a late frost which killed off the buds on our macrophylla (mophead) and seratta (mountain) hydrangeas. This year, however, the timing was just right.

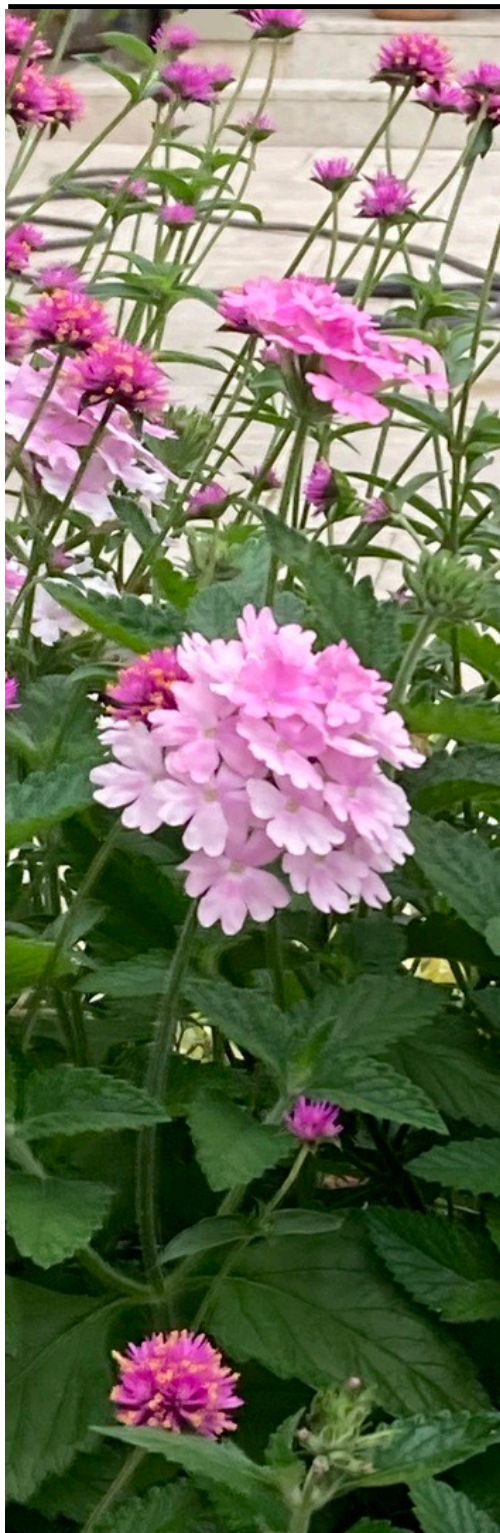
Both of these types of hydrangeas enjoy a cold winter during their dormancy, which is why you see such beautiful hydrangeas when you go north. They still do okay here - but just okay. Yes, you get a few blooms that gives the

hydrangea an
season; but this
over the top
types of these
change color
soil's pH. Acidic
changes the
pink/red to blue/
Sometimes you
of colors on one



atta boy for the
year they are
gorgeous. Both
hydrangeas
according to the
soil (below 7.0)
colors from
violet.

can get a mixed
shrub (see the
next page) because you have pockets of acidic soil. These hydrangeas shown are grown in sand with compost. Originally, the soil was tested with an 8.0 pH. I added compost when I planted and give a supplemental amount ever year to bring the pH down.





Hydrangea serrata 'Tuff Stuff' (Mountain Hydrangea)

H. serratas are in lace cap form. They bloom at the same time as H. macrophylla. They are shorter and more rounded than H. macrophylla. They are not generally found for sale in our area because we are at the top of their growing zone. More and more varieties of serrates are being offered on line. They are worth a try, especially if you live in a zone 8.



Hydrangea macrophylla 'Let's Dance (Big Leaf Hydrangea)

Part of the Endless Summer series, this hydrangea will send out smaller blooms later in the summer. Very large heads; and as you can see a variety of colors on one shrub due to the different pH



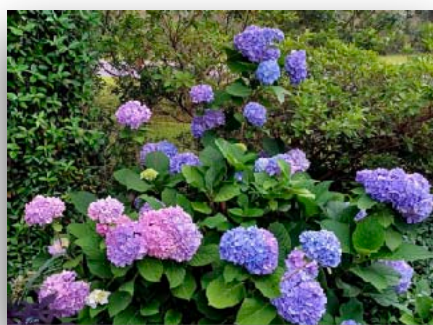
Hydrangea macrophylla 'Twist and Shout'

LET'S NOT FORGET THE OAKLEAF HYDRANGEA which was spectacular this year!

I hope that your hydrangeas are justly rewarding you this season with their beauty. Revel in it! And, do consider the lovely oakleaf as a reliable addition to your garden. They will consistently surprise you with their hauntingly beautiful white blooms. **AND THEY ARE NATIVE!**



Hydrangeas are not the picky bush that we have all come to accept. They need a cold winter to do their display, but we can't do anything about the weather. I always just accept what ever show they put on - even one flower is worth it!



Margaret Morrison

Pine Bark Beetles

-With Warming Weather Comes More Activity

Ian Stone Forestry & Natural Resource Agent

Pine Bark Beetles are an ever-present issue in both the urban and rural landscape across the Panhandle. If you have pines in your landscape you very well may experience issues with pine bark beetles. The tiny insects can decimate a pine rather quickly, and there are more than one type that can infest a tree. The Southern Pine Beetle is the bark beetle that most people are familiar with and most concerned about. In forestry settings the Southern Pine Beetle can have epidemic outbreaks that can devastate large areas of pine forests and plantation. While the Southern Pine Beetle is very destructive and a concern to forest health, there are other common pine bark beetles that often attack trees in our area. The two other common bark beetle are *lps* pine engraver beetles and Black Turpentine Beetles. In urban settings these two beetles often are more common but they can easily wipe out several trees or more, which may pose a significant issue in the landscape. There are multiple species of *lps* beetles and these tend to be a significant issue in landscapes, and they can easily wipe out most of the trees in a yard or park. They almost always target stressed or damaged trees, but they usually do not wipe out large areas like Southern Pine Beetle. Different *lps* species will often attack different portions of the tree which can result in partial dieback of the crown or a slow yellowing and browning of the foliage. These beetles are very small, smaller than a grain of rice, and often are not seen readily without close inspection. Like other bark beetles the bark will often have resin oozing out and forming small pockets resembling popcorn. Other signs include yellowing and browning foliage and an accumulation of sawdust like material around the

base. You may also see exit holes in the bark about the size of a pencil lead.

The Black Turpentine Beetle is closely related to the Southern Pine Beetle, but much larger and often attacks the lower portion of the tree. These beetles commonly attack older, damaged, and weakened trees. Historically they were often associated with turpentine operations and trees that had been worked for resin production, hence their common name. They are very attracted to trees that are damaged by equipment or that have had construction occur around them recently. The systems are generally the same as other pine bark beetles, but the resin pitches are larger and the exit holes are about the size of an eraser. While they are larger than other bark beetle they are still quite small by comparison to other insects, not much larger than a grain of rice and somewhat smaller than a pea.

If you notice pines in your area with bark beetle symptoms it is natural to be concerned. As the weather warms bark beetle activity increases and you may notice these symptoms on your pines. If you had bark beetles attack a tree in your yard last year you will want to keep an eye out for other pines being attacked in the spring. With the drought last year bark beetle activity increased and if the infected trees were not removed spots may reactivate in the spring and summer.

Unfortunately, once bark beetles attack a pine there is really nothing to do other than removal. Insecticides and sprays will not do anything against bark beetle that are already in the tree. If you have high value pines in your landscape you want to preserve, prevention is key. First and foremost avoiding issues from equipment damage and construction is key as this will attract beetles.



Preventative injections with systemic insecticides by a licensed professional can protect trees in your landscape. If you have noticed bark beetle activity in the area or have had to recently remove trees that died from bark beetles, consider preventative treatment to preserve trees that are at risk. Otherwise removing trees that become infested with bark beetles promptly is the best solution. Sometimes it can be difficult to determine what trees to remove, but any trees showing active bark beetle activity should be removed to prevent spread. Once bark beetles have colonized a tree and it is in decline preventative insecticide treatments are not going to be effective. You also don't need to remove every pine in your landscape just because a single tree has bark beetles. At the following link you will find a IFAS EDIS article that is helpful in identifying bark beetles and making a decision about an infected tree <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/FR399> .

If you see bark beetle activity on your property this spring contact the Walton County IFAS Extension Office or the Florida Forest Service County Forester's office for assistance and information. A Certified Arborist can assist you with determining how to remove infected trees or apply preventative treatments to trees at risk. With good decision making and management pine bark beetle attacks can be managed before they grow and spread. You can avoid losing trees in your landscape by being proactive and taking preventative measures. Now is a good time to keep an eye out and get ahead of any infestations that start.

SUCCESSFUL IRRIGATION REQUIRES EDUCATION

Lisa Emmons, Walton County Master Gardener Volunteer

In my time short time as a Master Gardener and working with the Walton County Extension agency, I have learned that the vast majority of landscaping and concerns that people seek advice on are problems they have caused themselves by overwatering. This is especially **true for turf grass** problems. Killing the landscape with over kindness.

I wonder if we had these issues back in the day when we had to drag the hose and sprinkler around the yard? It took a lot more effort to water than it does for many of us today with automatic irrigation systems. Just set it and forget it, right? I think we all want a simple answer, "Just tell me how long and how often, so I can set my system and know I have done it right."

If only it were that easy. Because to answer how long and how often, it depends. It depends how much water does your your sprinkler system deliver per minute? It depends on your soil type. It depends on the type of grass you have. It depends on the ambient temperature and soil temperature and what has the rain and humidity been like?

So the best and simplest answer for 'how long?' is, 'however long it takes to put 1/2 inch to 3/4inch of water on your lawn at a time.' And for 'how often?', is 'as needed.'

How long? The amount of water that you give your lawn in an irrigation session does not need to change seasonally. That is, if it is the height of summer growing season or late fall and it is going dormant. Any time you run your irrigation system your goal is to put 1/2 to 3/4 inch of water on the lawn. Light frequent watering is not good for the yard. Deep watering is important to develop deep root systems. Deep root systems means healthier, stronger plants.

How long does it take to put that much water on your yard?

The best way to find out, is to test each station in your system. Be prepared for a surprise, we were shocked at just how different each one of our stations were.

To test, place small straight sided cans, like a tuna or cat food cans in a straight line from the your sprinter to the edge of the watering pattern. Run the station for 15 minutes. Hopefully you will have roughly even amounts in each can. If not, you may have to adjust or change the sprinkler heads for that station.

Measure the amount of water in your can. If you have 1/4 inch of water you know you need to run that station for 30 to 45 minutes to reach the desired 1/2 to 3/4 inch application. Do this for each station.

We found we needed to run some stations for 20 minutes, while others needed to run for 45 in order to put enough water on the yard in a single session. Some of the stations have more sprinkler heads than others so each station delivers water at a different rate per minute.

Once you have the system set to deliver the right amount of water per session, turn the system off. Yes, turn it off!

It is best to turn it on only when you see that the yard needs water.

Your lawn is telling you it needs water when:

The leaf blades are folded in half lengthways in an attempt to conserve water. The grass begins to take on a blue gray tint rather than maintaining a green color. Footprints remain visible on the grass long after they are made.

These are the signs your yard is saying, turn that system on and give me a good soak! The best time for lawn irrigation is in the early morning hours. Watering in late afternoon may be detrimental if it extends the time the lawn is naturally wet from dew. A cool and damp lawn can accelerate many lawn diseases.

Please note that these guidelines are for established yards. Newly planted sod and seed needs water every day for the first approximate 6 to 8 weeks. Then depending on the weather etc, and assuming you have healthy root system established, you can back off to the as needed basis.

Remember, we receive over 60 inches of rain a year in Walton County. That counts too! A simple rain gauge will help you see just how much water your yard is getting.

A final few thoughts on water and our landscapes:

When we over water, we leech out many of the nutrients, some of which we paid good money for in the form of fertilizer. The problem is indeed magnified when we think about all that run off leeching into the beautiful bay we get to call home.

The signs of overwatering are usually visible later in the plant stress cycle than signs of under watering. Overwatering is also generally harder to recover from; the warmer it is and the more actively the yard is growing, the more water it will need. When it is growing slowly and when it is dormant, it will require much less water. But even when dormant, the roots still need water every week or so. Remember rain counts too! Even with our summer afternoon showers, our lawns will likely need supplemental watering. I for one am thankful that means simply walking to the side of the house and switching my system on to run the next morning, then turning it off again the next day.

Read more about it!

The University of Florida and IFAS (Institute for Food and Agricultural Science) maintain a web site with a wealth of scientific based information to help the Florida homeowner. Just add IFAS when googling whatever landscape subject you are looking for information on.

Good luck and happy gardening!

