

**PW**  
PROVEN  
WINNERS®

COLOR CHOICE  
FLOWERING SHRUBS

A NEW VISION FOR  
**REBLOOMING  
HYDRANGEAS**





STRATEGIC.  
INNOVATIVE.  
PROVEN.

These aren't the words that normally leap to mind when thinking about hydrangeas. But they are the ones that define the Proven Winners® ColorChoice® Shrubs approach to the Let's Dance® series of reblooming hydrangeas. Our breeding team doesn't just point to a nice-looking plant and say, "Wow, that's beautiful! Let's introduce it!" They instead take a scientific, data-driven approach to developing and evaluating new, game-changing *Hydrangea macrophylla* varieties that prioritizes performance over mere prettiness. After all, when it comes to bigleaf hydrangeas, beauty is the easy part. It's our clear vision for real world success, a meticulous attention to plant physiology, and a ruthless trialing system that make the Let's Dance® series the hydrangeas that don't merely grow – they actually perform.

### WHAT IS A REBLOOMING HYDRANGEA?

Reblooming, also known as remontant, hydrangeas bloom on old wood – growth created the previous season – in early summer, as conventional *Hydrangea macrophylla* do. They also bloom on new wood – the wood they create during the current season. These new wood flower buds provide a second chance at blooms in cases when the old wood flower buds are damaged by frost or freeze; under ideal conditions, they also extend bloom time by several months.

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF *Hydrangea macrophylla*

Sir Joseph Banks brings back bigleaf hydrangeas from Japan under the name *Hydrangea hortensis*.

1788

*Hydrangea macrophylla* becomes its official scientific name.

1830

The first Let's Dance® hydrangeas, Let's Dance® Moonlight and Let's Dance® Starlight, are developed by Tim Wood and introduced by Proven Winners® ColorChoice® Shrubs. As subsequent introductions have out-performed them, they are dropped from the line.

2009

56 MILLION YEARS AGO

The earliest hydrangeas appear in the fossil record.

1775

Botanist Carl Peter Thunberg goes to Japan and acquires five plants of what will become *Hydrangea macrophylla*, though it is first incorrectly called *Viburnum macrophylla*.

1829

Physician and plant explorer Philipp Franz von Siebold is expelled from his post in Japan after being accused of spying for the Russians. When he returns to the Netherlands, he has with him several species of hydrangeas, and a mophead selection of *Hydrangea macrophylla* that he named 'Otaska' in honor of his companion in Japan, Kusumoto Taki.

2001

After being discovered by Bailey Nurseries in St. Paul, Minnesota, Endless Summer® hydrangea is introduced as the first hydrangea to bloom on old and new wood, launching the category of "reblooming hydrangeas."

2020

Let's Dance Can Do!® hydrangea, the fastest, most reliable rebloomer to date, is introduced.

## THE PROBLEM

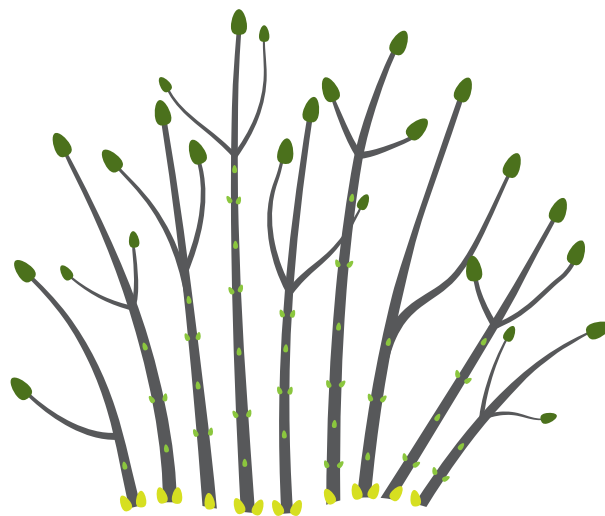
When the first reblooming hydrangeas hit the market in the early 2000s, everyone thought the era of hydrangea disappointment had ended for good. And while warm climate gardeners were generally pleased, in cold climates, winter kill still occurred and short, cool summers curtailed the promised rebloom. The hydrangea breeding program here at Proven Winners® ColorChoice® Shrubs arose out of the need to focus on what reblooming hydrangea will do in the real, unpredictable world, not on what they might do under ideal conditions.

## OUR SOLUTIONS

Strategic, performance-based goals are the foundation of Let's Dance® hydrangea breeding, with key benchmarks in place for hardiness, flower size, color, the length of time the plant blooms, and how long it takes to rebloom. We compile this data into a matrix, which our team uses as an objective source to assess new varieties and compare their performance to existing varieties.

To improve cold tolerance, we breed with *Hydrangea serrata*, also known as mountain hydrangea. This species is a close relative to *H. macrophylla*, and both are endemic to Japan. Bigleaf hydrangea, however, grows along the mild coastline, and mountain hydrangea occurs at high altitudes, where it has naturally evolved better stem and bud hardiness from its exposure to harsh conditions.

To improve both bloom and rebloom, we've developed proprietary strains of plants that set flower buds down the entire length of their stem, not just at the tips like conventional bigleaf hydrangeas. Using these in our breeding introduces the potential for plants to bloom even if the worst happens: namely, winter or spring cold damage, animal browsing, or those well-intentioned but ill-fated cut backs. It also ensures a faster, more abundant rebloom.



## FOUR TRAITS OF A **PROVEN WINNERS®** **COLORCHOICE®** **REBLOOMING HYDRANGEA**

- 1** Inherent stem and bud hardiness, so winter dieback becomes less likely.
- 2** The presence of sub-terminal flower buds, breaking from the typical apical dominance of *H. macrophylla*, which forms buds only at the tips of the stems.
- 3** Plants form basal buds (buds at soil level), a trait that's particularly important for survival and bloom in cold climates.
- 4** The ability to form new wood blooms rapidly in summer, with no need for vernalization.



Hydrangeas under evaluation  
in the trial garden.

## LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION.

Let's Dance® hydrangeas have all been developed in Michigan – not in the South or in Europe, where conditions naturally favor ideal *Hydrangea macrophylla* growing conditions. At our facilities, plants are subjected to cold, killing winters and to short summers that usually impair blooming. We test and evaluate every Let's Dance® hydrangea in containers in our greenhouse, which simulates a grower's experience; in the ground in our open, exposed R&D field, which simulates harsh conditions; and planted in our trial garden, which mimics home landscape conditions. We also do something that you're never supposed to do to bigleaf hydrangeas: cut them back. That's done in winter, in spring, and after their first bloom to test their likelihood and speed of reblooming. We learn the limits of a plant's performance the hard way so you don't have to.



The research & development team behind Let's Dance hydrangeas.

## A WALK THROUGH OUR **DEVELOPMENT + TRIALING PROCESS**

### YEAR 1

Head plant breeder Megan Mathey and her team select parent plants with promise and make crosses, transferring the pollen of one to the stigma of another. Thousands of seeds are collected when they ripen in autumn. The team carefully labels each collection with the parentage for data collection and evaluation.

### YEAR 2

Seed from the previous year's crosses is sown in late winter, and the seedlings trimmed and shifted into one-gallon containers and grown in our greenhouse. At this point, a very preliminary

evaluation can take place, and the R&D team discards plants that are weak or disease-prone. Even at this early stage, certain desirable qualities can make themselves known, such as compactness, resistance to wilting, or unique foliage.

### YEAR 3

Plants bloom for the first time, and the team is able to evaluate flower color, form, and size. The small percentage of plants with high potential will have cuttings taken, and moved into three-gallon containers.

### YEAR 4

Thirty-eight plants of each variety worthy of further evaluation are propagated. Three of those go to our trial garden, five go out to our trial field, and the remaining 30 are grown in containers in our R&D house for the rest of the season.

### YEARS 5-9

During this phase, we test and evaluate unintroduced varieties alongside those already on the market for comparison in our greenhouse, in our field, and in our trial garden. It gets pretty brutal, as we do everything you aren't supposed to do to bigleaf hydrangeas to thoroughly test their performance.

**MID-WINTER:** All plants in the container trial are cut back to the ground to simulate winter kill/improper pruning. This tests for the presence of basal buds – those toward the base of the plant – to see if the plant is still able to produce flowers.

**SPRING:** Plants are allowed to fully flush out, and once they do, they are divided into two groups. One group is cut back to just four nodes above the ground; the other allowed to grow. This simulates the late spring frost that often kills flower buds on plants that otherwise survived winter. The untrimmed group serves to test stem strength.

**TRUE REMONTANCY TEST:** After the initial bloom evaluation, half of the plants are trimmed to remove the spent bloom and the two nodes below it. This tests whether the plant can set flower buds without vernalization (i.e., exposure to cold temperatures), whether or not they benefit from deadheading to achieve rebloom, and how quickly they produce new wood flowers. We also assess undesirable traits, like a tendency to flop, splay, wilt, or develop disease.

**COLOR TRIAL:** Half the group is treated with aluminum sulfate to evaluate color change potential.



These processes are repeated each year to test for consistency and observed weekly during the growing season. All data is recorded and added to the matrix, which is analyzed each winter. This is a ruthless phase of the trial, with 95% of the potential new varieties destroyed for under-performance. Only varieties that flower reliably year after year, freeze after freeze, and frost after frost in our harsh Michigan climate are considered for naming and introduction.

### YEAR 9-10

The one or two plants that look better and have outperformed existing varieties on the market will be propagated to increase numbers as they move toward introduction in our next catalog.

It has been a long journey, but the results are worth it.

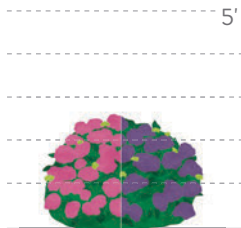
HERE'S A LOOK AT THE VARIETIES THAT  
HAVE MADE THE CUT SO FAR.



Head plant breeder  
Megan Mathey proudly  
displays Let's Dance  
Sky View™ hydrangea  
upon its selection.

# THE BREAKTHROUGH

Let's Dance ¡Arriba! hydrangea made history as the first-ever reblooming bigleaf/mountain hybrid with mophead flowers. While lacecaps certainly have their charm, we have to give the people what they want, and that's big, blousy mopheads; so much the better if they have the reliability and cold tolerance of mountain hydrangeas. There's more to love about Let's Dance ¡Arriba! hydrangea than its blooms: deep green foliage has an almost waxy look, resists wilting and disease, and sets off those supremely colorful mophead blooms.



## LET'S DANCE ¡ARRIBA!®

USDA 4-9

2-3' tall + wide



*Hydrangea macrophylla* × *serrata* 'SMNHSC'  
pp#33,206, cbraf



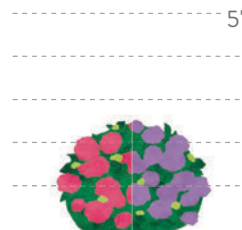






## THE SHOWBOAT

Drumroll, please: introducing Let's Dance Big Band hydrangea. If you're in the mood for jazzy color and a virtuosic performance, it would be hard to do better than this recent addition to the series. Whether your conditions favor its enormous florets in deep red-pink or lush purple, it positively sings in the garden or landscape when it's in bloom and of course, when it reblooms, performing with applause-worthy aplomb summer to fall.



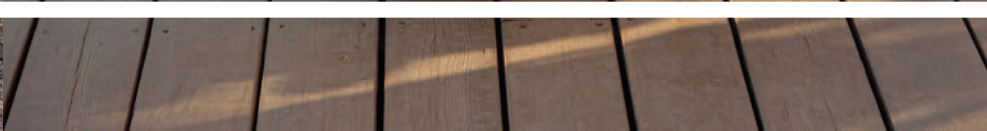
### LET'S DANCE BIG BAND®

USDA 5-9

2.5' tall + wide

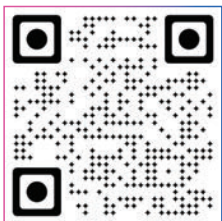


*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'SMNHMP'  
pp#32,514, cbraf

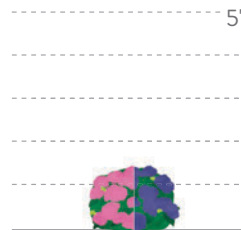


# THE SPACE-SAVER

Yes, you can grow reblooming hydrangeas, even if you're short on space: Let's Dance Blue Jangles hydrangea is the smallest variety on the market. Its diminutive 1-2' size eliminates the need and temptation to cut it back, the fatal mistake made by so many whose hydrangeas have overgrown their original spot. Its neat, rounded frame is covered in mophead flowers that readily turn blue when conditions allow.



SCAN HERE TO LEARN  
MORE ABOUT GROWING  
BIGLEAF HYDRANGEAS  
IN CONTAINERS.



## LET'S DANCE® BLUE JANGLES®

USDA 5-9  
1-2' tall + wide



*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'SMHMTAU'  
pp#27,035, cbr#5283

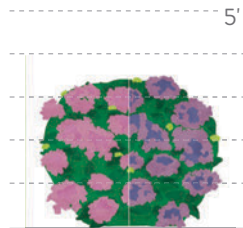






# THE POWERHOUSE

Whatever your obstacle to success with bigleaf hydrangeas – cold winters, pruning, no rebloom, perhaps all three, even – Let’s Dance Can Do! hydrangea can and will rise to meet it. We have seen, year after year, this plant bloom in June despite being cut back in March (not that we recommend that!), as well as continue to produce flowers all summer long, despite being planted between an asphalt parking lot and a sidewalk. As a bonus, the foliage develops warm fall color (*pictured*). Even though we have evaluated thousands of hydrangeas in our time, few have impressed us with their sheer resilience and flowering ability like Let’s Dance Can Do hydrangea.



## LET’S DANCE CAN DO!®

USDA 4-9

3-4’ tall + 3’ wide

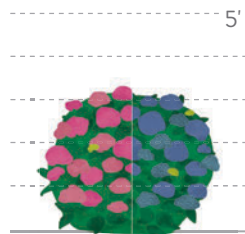


*Hydrangea macrophylla* × *serrata* ‘SMNHSI’  
pp#32,548, cbraf



# THE BLUE-MER

Browsing around for the best blue bigleaf? You've found it in Let's Dance Rhythmic Blue hydrangea. Its full mophead flowers naturally favor blue tones when soil chemistry allows, providing that beachy look that never goes out of fashion. Each floret has an exaggerated star-like shape that bestows an extra dimension of beauty and interest, assuring this is anything but your run-of-the-mill blue hydrangea.



## LET'S DANCE® RHYTHMIC BLUE®

USDA 5-9

3-4' tall + wide



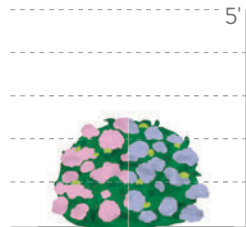
*Hydrangea macrophylla* 'SMHMES14'  
pp#25,836, cbr#5126





# THE DEBUTANTE

Ethereal color and stellar performance make Let's Dance Sky View hydrangea seem as if sent directly from garden heaven. Whether the flowers take on the dreamy blue of a sunny day or the glowing pink of a summer sunset, the honeydew-lime center of each floret makes for a postcard-perfect display. The most recent addition to the series, look for this hardy, reliable rebloomer at garden centers starting in 2023.



## LET'S DANCE SKY VIEW™

USDA 4-9

2-3' tall + 2-4' wide



*Hydrangea macrophylla* × *serrata* 'SMNHSME'  
pp#34,327, cbraf





# KEYS TO SUCCESS



As much as we dedicate ourselves to overcoming bigleaf hydrangeas' inherent liabilities, choosing the right spot and caring for them properly play a substantial role in your success. Here are our recommendations for growing Let's Dance® hydrangeas like an expert.

## HARDINESS + HEAT TOLERANCE

Bigleaf hydrangeas are generally hardy in USDA zones 5 through 9. The zone 4 hardy Let's Dance hydrangeas earn that distinction because they set their buds along the entire length of their stem so they won't just survive but are likely to bloom. In terms of heat tolerance, they will do much better in humid/sub-tropical zone 9 areas over arid/desert areas.

## SOIL

Bigleaf hydrangeas thrive in "moist but well-drained soil," which is to say that very dry conditions should be avoided, as should wet conditions. Mulch is a bigleaf hydrangea's best friend, as it protects their shallow roots and conserves soil moisture. It's a myth that *Hydrangea macrophylla* requires acidic soil – they tolerate various soil pH levels, including neutral to mildly alkaline soils. The myth, of course, derives from the role of soil pH in flower color change, which we discuss on the next page.

## WATER

Bigleaf hydrangeas benefit from regular water, especially during hot, dry weather. Their big leaves (literally the meaning of *macrophylla*) give off water faster than the roots can replace it, which causes wilting. Shade during the hottest, sunniest part of the day can prevent this, but it will occur during periods of high heat, even under ideal conditions. Not to worry, though – they will bounce right back.

## LIGHT

Four to six hours of sun each day is ideal. In cooler climates, they can take more sun; in warmer climates, they absolutely require shade during the hottest part of the day. A bit of strong sun, or filtered light through the day, ensures strong stems and vivid flower color, so avoid deeply shaded locations.

## FERTILIZER

While fertilizing reblooming hydrangeas regularly is not necessary, it does speed growth and rebloom. The shorter and cooler your summers, the more beneficial regular fertilizer will be. Use a granular rose fertilizer monthly from early spring through about late July, though in hot climates and rich soils, a spring application

is sufficient. Fertilizing beyond late July can push soft growth that increases the chance for winterkill. Avoid acidifying fertilizers unless you are certain of your soil pH; for the best blue flowers, avoid fertilizers high in phosphorous.

## PRUNING

Though Let's Dance hydrangeas bloom better on new wood than other rebloomers, we strongly recommend treating them as you would non-rebloomers, which is to say avoid pruning except to remove dead wood and any spent flowers still clinging to the plant in spring. It is not feasible to attempt to control a bigleaf hydrangea's height through trimming. Instead, select a variety that is an appropriate height and width for your site. Up to one-third of the oldest growth on mature plants can be removed in early spring if desired.

All this said, *Hydrangea macrophylla* is not for everyone or every garden. Some people, particularly in very cold climates, those in USDA zones 4 and 5 without reliable snow cover, and those with frequent spring frosts, will still be better off with the unwavering hardiness and rock-solid reliability of *Hydrangea paniculata* and *Hydrangea arborescens*. You'll find equally innovative varieties of both of those species from Proven Winners® ColorChoice® Shrubs as well.

# BLOOM COLOR

## COLOR RANGES

LET'S DANCE ¡ARRIBA!® pink to purple

LET'S DANCE BIG BAND® red-pink to violet

LET'S DANCE® BLUE JANGLES® pink to blue

LET'S DANCE CAN DO!® pastel pink to lavender

LET'S DANCE® RHYTHMIC BLUE® pink to blue

LET'S DANCE SKY VIEW™ pastel pink to sky blue

There are three factors that influence flower color: genetics, soil pH, and the presence of aluminum. Few gardeners consider the role of genetics in flower color, but the hue and intensity that a hydrangea is capable of achieving is, first and foremost, a genetic trait. As such, buying a variety that has the potential to bloom the color you want is a crucial first step.

That bigleaf and mountain hydrangeas bloom blue in acidic soils and pink in neutral to alkaline soils is an oversimplification. It's the presence of aluminum, a naturally occurring soil element, that changes the color, not the pH level alone. Soil pH contributes to color change because aluminum ions are available for the plant to take up in acidic soils; conversely, they are held in tight bond in neutral to alkaline soils. Two soil conditions must be true





for a hydrangea to bloom blue: the soil must contain abundant aluminum, and it must be acidic.

Many people mistakenly think that achieving a good purple is about a just-right pH. While it's true that many varieties will take on a lavender tone on their way to blue, a true, deep purple is only going to come about if the variety is inherently capable of turning purple. Such varieties will not turn blue. Similarly, the truest reds only come about genetically.

While a soil test is the only way to know for sure if your soil needs aluminum, a pH change, or both, you can take advantage of a few simple visual cues. First, if your soil is clay or loam, you can be fairly certain that it contains aluminum, and that a soil acidifier

will be sufficient for a color change. Second, take a look at the hydrangeas in your area. Whatever color they tend to bloom is approximately what you can expect, too. If you decide to treat your plants, read labels thoroughly before purchasing anything, and be patient: timing is key for success.

One final note: temperature plays a role in flower color as well. Plants synthesize their pigments at night, and do so more effectively when the nighttime temperatures are cool. Hot nights cause pigments to degrade more rapidly, leading to pale or muddy colors. This is why you might go on a vacation to a fabulous coastal location and see much more vivid colors than you would in, say, the Midwest or South. It's also why your hydrangea blooms might be more vivid in some years than others.



# THE **SUCCESS** YOU'VE LONGED FOR.

This photo from our 2022 greenhouse trial shows why selecting the next great Let's Dance® hydrangea is no easy task. Believe it or not, we're not looking for the most beautiful in the bunch: we're looking for the one or two individuals that have what it takes to eliminate the uncertainty and confusion that have discouraged so many gardeners in the past. By prioritizing real-world performance over mere prettiness, we aim to make the Let's Dance series change the way people think about and grow bigleaf hydrangeas.

Ready to share in our new vision for reblooming hydrangeas? Ask for Let's Dance hydrangeas at your favorite local garden center, and get started with the hydrangea planting of your dreams.

Show us your Proven Winners® ColorChoice® hydrangeas on social media! Tag photos with [#pwwcshrubs](https://www.facebook.com/ProvenWinnersColorChoice), or reach out to us at [ProvenWinnersColorChoice.com](https://www.ProvenWinnersColorChoice.com).







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