

Hooray for hydrangeas! The last decade has seen an enormous increase in the number of varieties available at local garden centers, so many that some gardeners are collecting them like others amass large hosta and daylily collections. I will admit it – I have been bitten by the hydrangea bug, and while I don't want to collect one of every single type, I am excited about the crop of new cultivars coming soon.

Diminutive in dimensions but colossal in character, **Hydrangea arborescens 'Invincibelle Wee White'** is the first dwarf Annabelle. With many of the fine qualities of its mother, Invincibelle Wee White offers durability, adaptability, low maintenance and summer-long bloom. Orbs of pure white flowers sit atop sturdy stems on mounding plants growing 12 to 30 inches tall and a bit wider.

Grow Invincibelle Wee White in at least six hours of sun each day for the strongest stems and the most blooms, but protect it from the hottest part of the afternoon. It is extremely cold hardy to Zone 3, so I am going to plant a couple in urns that flank the entrance to my shade garden where they may just overwinter in the pots. It would also play nicely with other plants in a perennial garden or beautifully edge a mixed border.

It does not require a great deal of care. Add a layer of mulch around the plant to help the soil retain moisture, feed in early spring with a flowering shrub fertilizer, and prune the whole plant back by about a third in the spring.

Another member of the Invincibelle family, **Hydrangea arborescens 'Invincibelle Ruby'** boasts massive, red and light pink flowers that burst open from dark burgundy buds. Strong stems hold blooms high and are great for cutting. It has dark green foliage – the perfect backdrop for its bi-colored flowers.

Invincibelle Ruby grows just 2 to 3 feet tall and 3 to 4 feet wide and is an ideal specimen plant in small gardens. It would also be an eye-catching foundation plant or a shot of color in a shrub border.

The care and cultural requirements are similar to Invincibelle Wee White. The bloom color is not affected by soil pH like some other hydrangeas.

Hydrangea arborescens 'Incrediball Blush' grows a bit larger – 4 to 5 feet tall and wide. Basketball-sized, blush-pink flowers continue to bloom from mid-summer and deepen to dark pink before fading to chartreuse as they age.

Incrediball Blush would be a gorgeous friendly hedge between neighbors, a mid-ground player in a shrub border, and a beauty towards the back of a perennial garden. This very cold hardy plant prefers a spot in full sun to light shade and is adaptable to most soils as long as they aren't soggy.

There is no need to prune, but it can be cut back nearly to the ground in early spring. Like Invincibelle Ruby, its color is not affected by soil pH.

Hydrangea First Editions® ‘Diamond Rouge’ boasts huge, cone-shaped, white flowers that start blooming in July and then begin a magical color transformation from pink to raspberry red settling on deep wine red at summer’s end. Red-tinted stems add to the appeal.

The shrub grows 4 to 5 feet tall and almost as wide. It will perform best in a sunny location with a bit of shade during the hottest part of the afternoon. It’s not fussy about soil as long it is well-drained. Plant one at the corner of a patio or towards the back of a perennial border.

If you love the chartreuse blooms of Limelight hydrangea but don’t have the space for this buxom beauty, consider **Hydrangea ‘Candy Apple’**. It grows a more manageable 4 to 5 feet wide and nearly as wide. Strong stems present massive cones densely packed with apple green flowers that age to pure white and then to soft pink.

Grow Candy Apple in a sunny to partly sunny mixed border, as a specimen plant, or in a mass planting of magnificent blooms. Don’t forget to cut some for floral arrangements.

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