

Use of Clematis

Clematis vines are very versatile and useful in the landscape. Given support, clematis can provide a large vertical display while taking up very little ground space. Clematis can enhance an architectural feature or cover an unsightly one. Trained on overhead structures they can also cool terraces and provide shade from the summer heat.

Blooming

Clematis will lend an abundance of color and interest to any garden. Individual flowers can last up to three or four weeks. Removing faded flowers will promote repeat flowering. Except for the fall or early spring blooming varieties, most Clematis bloom profusely in May or June and then sporadically until fall.

Planting and care

Though clematis is often labeled finicky or hard to grow, they can be established easily and successfully when their few preferences are accommodated. Here's what they like:

- A bright spot (but not too hot or reflective) and mulched soil or a shady spot for their roots.
- Plenty of water and reasonably well drained fertile loam.
- A trellis or host plant to climb or ramble on.

Prepare a hole at least twice the size of the container the plant was purchased in. Mix a spade full of compost or peat into the soil at the bottom. (If using manure, keep it out of immediate contact with the roots.) Blend some compost and the appropriate amount of Al's Transplanting Fertilizer with the soil removed from the planting hole and use this blended soil to backfill around the plant. Preparing the proper planting conditions will repay you for your efforts many times over in vigor and blooms.

Before removing the plant from the container, pry its stake free from the side with a screwdriver. (Our growers have stapled the stake to the pot to prevent the lower vine from being damaged from too much flexing and movement.) Once the stake is free, your plant can be slipped out carefully and set into the hole. While handling and planting your clematis, take care not to flex or kink the vine, especially down near the crown. Injury to this area can provide entry for disease later.

Position the plant low enough to bury the crown about 2" deeper than it was in the container. (Approximately 2 sets of healthy leaf nodes.) Remove any leaves that the soil would cover. By planting deep, you're ensuring that if disease ever strikes the above-ground part of your plant, these dormant buried buds will wake up and regenerate the plant. After filling and firming the soil in around the plant, provide mulch over the root zone.

To encourage branching, pinch out the tips of any longer new growth during the first season. Sacrificing a few flowers will ensure a healthy full plant.

Fertilizer

Early each spring, feed with a rose food or a balanced fertilizer such as Al's All Purpose Slow Release 10-4-8 or Espoma's Plant Tone. Clematis like calcium, so supplement once a year, (in early spring) with one cup of Garden Lime.

Pruning

You probably will never injure your vine by pruning it. Don't be afraid to shape or guide it by trimming lightly at any time of the year. These are vigorous plants; they will recover nicely.

The amount of bloom you will get depends quite a lot on how much and when you prune your vine. How much to prune is based on when your variety flowers. This may sound complicated, but it isn't. The plants can be divided into three groups based on when they bloom:

Group A:

Early Season Bloomers like the alpina, macropetala, armandii, and montana require no pruning. If you like, light pruning and shaping can be done shortly after color is past. Winter trimming will reduce your bloom because the flower buds are set on this dormant wood.

Group B:

Large Flowered Hybrids whose main bloom is in May prefer some pruning to look their best. After their main bloom, re-invigorate the plant by cutting about the quarter or a third of the main branches back down to about a foot or so. Though this kind of pruning isn't necessary to promote fullest bloom, it will promote fresh growth from ground level which will keep the lower part of the plant from looking bare. This group includes many popular varieties like Nelly Moser, Ramona, Dr. Ruppel, Niobe, Henryi and The President.

Group C:

The Summer Bloomers are the ones that prefer to be pruned clear down (to 8" or 10") when dormant in the winter. These are vigorous varieties that replace the full vine from the ground each year. They include popular varieties as Jackmanii, Comtesse de Bouchard, and the viticella varieties.

Here's the general rule for pruning: if your vine blooms mainly before June 1st, little or no pruning is necessary. If color comes after June 1st, prune it hard when it's fully dormant.

What happens if you prune your plant incorrectly? Nothing too serious, at worst you will delay bloom on the early flowering varieties.