

# CLEMATIS

## and Other Climbers

BY BARBARA PHILLIPS

Clematis is often called the ‘Queen of Vines’ because of its extravagant floral beauty. Some of its common names are less regal, such as ‘Traveller’s Joy’, ‘Leather Flower’ and ‘Virgin’s Bower’, which comes from a legend of the Virgin Mary and the Christ child taking shelter under a canopy of clematis. Clematis grows in temperate climates all over the world, and with over 200 species and hundreds of hybrids, the choice is overwhelming.

There is a Clematis for every garden and almost every hardiness zone.

Clematis are mainly climbers, although a few will grow in shrub form. Most gardeners want climbing, flowering vines that will provide color and interest throughout the growing season. There are early bloomers, mid-season bloomers, late-season bloomers, and a few varieties that will bloom twice in the season. This fact sheet will identify the season of bloom for popular varieties and provide information on how to establish and care for your clematis.



*Clematis alpina* ‘Willy’ PHOTO: Vic Bentley

## CLEMATIS TYPES

The summer-blooming hybrids bear spectacular single, semi-double or double blooms; some have bell- and tulip-shaped flowers, and some have 4-petaled dogwood-like or small starry blooms. Flowers come in violet, purple-blue, pink, crimson, mauve, white, and even yellow. The flowers are followed by feathery, silvery seed heads that are quite ornamental.

Plant size, vigor, and habit also vary. Most large-flowered hybrids range from 2–3 m (6–12 ft.) in height, but some species exceed 7 m (20 ft.) or more.

Clematis can be grouped in a number of ways. Plant breeders classify hybrid cultivars into nine groups according to their growth habit, bloom season and color, but the home gardener is generally most interested in flower shape and color, as well as growth habit.

Perhaps you are looking for a climbing variety that will cover an unsightly shed, or a tree that needs a bit of color, or even to create a trail of flowered vines down a slope. Or perhaps you would like a blooming shrub to fill in a corner of your garden. Whether in sun or shade, there is a clematis that will suit the spot.

Many native clematis will grow with little extra care, even in poor soils and climates. Some examples are *C. ligusticifolia* (‘Traveler’s Joy’, ‘Virgin’s Bower’), *C. columbiana* and the drought-tolerant species *C. tangutica*.



Front cover:  
*Clematis viticella*  
‘Etoile Violette’  
PHOTO: Vic Bentley

## PRUNING GROUPS

The simplest way to classify clematis varieties is by their bloom season, which determines their pruning requirement. ‘Early’ will vary, depending on where you garden, but can generally be taken to mean in the spring.

**Group A** – Early blooming clematis: These bloom in spring on last year’s growth (old wood). Prune immediately after flowering to remove dead or damaged growth and to shape the plants and keep them in bounds. Pruning is used to maintain the desired growth structure and is not necessary to encourage continued blooming.

**Group B** – Early large-flowered hybrids: These bloom in spring and have a repeat bloom in mid- to late summer. The first flowers come on old wood and the second flush is produced on new wood at the tips of the current year’s growth. Before growth begins in the spring, prune out dead or damaged growth and cut stems back to a strong set of buds.

**Group C** – Late-flowering clematis: This group includes large-flowered hybrids that bloom on new growth from summer to early fall. Prune them hard annually in early spring, before growth begins, by cutting them down to just above a healthy pair of buds about 1 m (3 ft.) above the ground. Prune herbaceous clematis, such as *C. integrifolia*, in this manner as well.

## BLOOM SEASON

### Mid to late spring

*C. arandii* (cream/white), *C. alpina* ‘Helsingborg’ (blue/purple), ‘Pamela Jackman’ (blue/mauve), ‘Alice Fisk’ (pale blue), ‘Allanah’ (red), ‘Jaqueline du Pre’ (rosy mauve/pink) – bloom on old wood.

### May and June

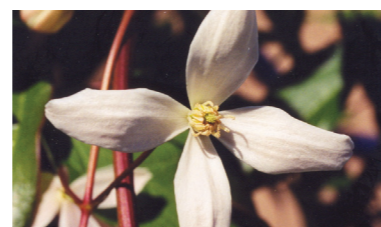
*C. montana* ‘Alba’ (white), *C. montana* ‘Rubens’ (pale pink), *C. montana* var. *wilsonii* (cream) – can reach over 30 feet, *C.* ‘The President’ (blue).

### June to September

*C. tangutica* ‘Golden Harvest’, ‘Gravetye’ – the most common yellow species, bell-like flowers, attractive seed heads.

### July to September

*C. texensis* ‘Duchess of Albany’ (pink), ‘Etoile Rose’ (reddish pink) – beautiful foliage but can be susceptible to mildew.



*Clematis arandii*  
PHOTO: Vic Bentley



*Clematis chisanensis* ‘Lemon Bells’  
PHOTO: Vic Bentley



*Clematis* ‘Belle of Woking’  
PHOTO: Vic Bentley



*Clematis* ‘Carnaby’  
PHOTO: Vic Bentley



*Clematis Priscilla* PHOTO: Vic Bentley

## WHERE AND HOW TO GROW YOUR CLEMATIS

The best advice is to read the label. Everything you need to know about successfully growing a clematis is on the supplier’s label, which will indicate if the plant requires sun, part sun or shade.

Select a site with well-drained, slightly acid to alkaline soil. Clematis will grow in heavy clay soil if it is amended with plenty of organic matter at planting time. Ideally, plant clematis where plants can have their “heads in the sun and feet in the shade”. Look for a spot where the roots will be shaded by low-growing shrubs or perennials, or next to the north (shaded) side of shrubs or even a low wall. Dappled to partial shade, particularly during the hottest part of the day, is ideal. Afternoon shade is essential for good performance in areas with hot summers, especially for large-flowered hybrids, which do not tolerate much direct sun.

When planting clematis, set the root ball below finished grade so that a few inches of the stem is buried. Mulch to keep the root run cool, but do not allow mulch to touch the stems, as it leads to rot. Water deeply during dry weather. Feed plants annually in spring with well-rotted manure or a balanced fertilizer. Once established in a suitable site, clematis are long-lived and easy to grow.

Clematis require a trellis or other support. The vines attach themselves to supports using twining leaf-stalks, but cannot attach to bare fences or walls or wrap around large supports. They need strings, lattice, or small supports to cling to. Tie them to trellises with yarn or soft string to get them started. Install trellises or other supports before planting, because it’s easy to damage the vines.

To train clematis over a tree or shrub, plant it away from the main roots of the woody plant to minimize competition. If the site is along a wall or building, plant out from the foundation.

## PROBLEMS

### Diseases

Some species are susceptible to **mildew** and therefore good air circulation is essential.

The biggest worry is an attack of **Clematis Wilt**. This is caused by a fungus (*Ascochyta clematidina*) which enters the stem through a wound near or within 1 m of the soil level. An attack causes the plant to literally wilt or collapse. The best treatment is to cut and dispose of (not in the compost) the affected parts, plus 3 cm (1 in.) to be sure. In most cases the clematis recovers fully within two years. New growth is produced from dormant buds, which remain above or just below soil level, which is why it is important to plant deep because new growth is possible even after all top growth has been removed. Correct and hard pruning of clematis in the earlier years of the plant's life also helps to prevent wilt from being fatal and assists with a quick recovery.

### Pests

Clematis can be beset by slugs and earwigs. The best treatment is to trap and remove them.

## OTHER VINES

There are many beautiful climbing vines to consider other than Clematis. Vigorous annual vines include Cup and Saucer vine (*Cobaea scandens*), Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*), Sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratas*), Black-eyed Susan (*Thunbergia alata*) and Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*).

Perennial climbers can be grown for flowers, berries, and foliage. Most of the following are hardy to Zone 5 in British Columbia.

Kiwi (*Actinidia kolomikta*) – Flowers, berries, foliage  
Porcelain berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) – Foliage  
Dutchman's pipe (*Aristolochia macrophylla*) – Flower, large leaves  
Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) – Flowers  
Trumpet vine (*Campsis radicans*) – Flowers  
Bittersweet (*Celastris orbiculata*.) – Fall fruit (females)  
Silver lace vine (*Fallopia aubertii*) – Flowers, fruit  
Climbing hydrangea (*Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*) – Flowers, peeling bark  
Honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.) – Flowers, berries  
Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) – Red fall leaves  
Wisteria (*W. sinensis*; *W. floribunda*) – Flowers  
Grape (*Vitis* spp.) – Fruit

### REFERENCES

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[www.clematis.com](http://www.clematis.com) – for full descriptions of Clematis by name, flower color, flowering time, planting aspect.



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