



# Clematis



Clematis is one of the most popular ornamental plants grown in this area because of its variety, versatility, long-flowering season and ease of culture. Clematis is available in a wide spectrum of colors and a variety of shapes and sizes. In addition to the more common vining clematis, there are many non-vining "scramblers" and shrub forms for use in the home landscape.

Clematis belongs to the same family as peonies, hellebores, anemones and delphiniums. They share a preference for deep, rich well-drained soil. Most clematis flourish in light shade to full sun as long as their roots are well mulched and cool. Some colors retain their vibrancy better out of full sun. Many clematis are hardy to Zone 4. In the Kansas City area, we are in Zone 5, which means clematis will "winter over" and survive well here.

## Site Selection

The ideal location for clematis is in bright shade or filtered sunlight. As the old saying goes,

*To keep a clematis happy, put it where its feet are in the shade and its head is in the sun.*

This means planting it where it gets at least a half-day of sun. The root systems prefer the coolness of shade provided by mulch and plants. To avoid damage to the vines, select a location protected from strong winds.

## Buying Clematis

The best planting time for clematis is in early spring or fall, during cool weather. When buying plants, select the largest plants possible. Local suppliers have increased the quality and selection of the varieties they offer. Many now offer the more desirable 3 and

4-year-old plants that ensure healthy, vigorous stock. Look for strong, undamaged stems. Also, select multi-stemmed plants that are well staked or supported to prevent breakage.

## Planting Clematis

Clematis are long-lived perennials. Getting them off to a good start will pay long term dividends in plant health and vigor. Soil preparation, proper planting depth and site selection are the most important factors in success with clematis. Clematis prefer a neutral to slightly acidic soil.

To plant:

1. Dig a hole 12 to 18 inches deep.
2. Remove the soil and mix with an equal amount of well composted cow manure before replacing.
3. Most potted clematis come with a bamboo stake in the pot. Remove the plant carefully, keeping the stake in place. Incline the stake and the attached plant toward the support on which you want the plant to grow.
4. Place the plant in the hole 4 to 6 inches below the level at which it grew in the container. This provides extra protection from cold and will encourage new growth if the stems are broken.
5. Firm the soil carefully around the roots and water in thoroughly.

## Care and Maintenance

**Water.** Like most vines, clematis are heavy drinkers and feeders. They appreciate a soil rich in organic matter and a moderate but ample supply of water.

**Manure.** It is helpful to add a shovel full of well-rotted cow manure on each plant in early spring and again in the fall. Keep the manure away from the stems. This feeds and protects the roots over an extended period of time without burning.

## Diseases

The delicate frame of clematis makes them susceptible to a fungal disease called *stem rot* or *clematis wilt*. The disease tends to be the plant's most severe problem and can be particularly pronounced in young plants and some of the larger-flower hybrids. It blocks a plant's access to water from its roots so it severely wilts or collapses—sometimes in a single night.

You can help prevent this disease by carefully securing the stems to a trellis or stake, handling the plant delicately during pruning and providing adequate moisture, feeding, root protection and light exposure.

Should your plant get stem rot, the good news is the disease is not usually fatal. To remedy the situation:

- Cut the plant back 1 or more inches below the wilting in what appears to be healthy tissue. Even if you have to cut back to ground level, the roots usually send out new, healthy growth.
- Use a fungicide drench such as diophate found in Fertilome's Halt.

## Supporting Clematis

Young plants, and the new growth of mature plants, should be supported to provide directional training and to avoid breaking the often brittle stems. Clematis vines climb by twining their young, flexible leaf stalks around an object. The leaf stalks cannot grab a flat surface. You need to give them some kind of support.

Fences, trellises, posts and arbors are good supports. To help clematis climb a post or trellis, provide wire screening, nylon netting or wooden lath. Tie the stems carefully to the support.

Clematis is especially effective when grown into shrubs, small trees, roses and other vines. The host plant adds protection, natural support color and texture contrasts. Large trees are also a possibility. You may need to attach black nylon netting to the trunk so the clematis will have something to grip.

## Basic Clematis Pruning

Much is written on the subject of the right way to prune clematis. The fact of the matter is that the plant will continue to bloom each year whether you prune it or not, so pruning is not absolutely necessary.

**Why prune?** There are several reasons why you should prune. The main reason most people prune is to enhance the plant's beauty. Pruning removes damaged or weak stems, which improves the aesthetics of the plant. Pruning rejuvenates older plants by stimulating new growth. Pruning increases the ability of the plant to bloom and can also help to direct the plant and control its size.

There is a relatively simple, basic method that takes a lot of worry out of pruning. Clematis blooms on either last season's growth or on new growth from the current season. This determines the proper pruning time and the amount of pruning recommended. If in doubt, do not prune before flowering!

**Pruning large-flowered clematis.** Most large-flowered clematis varieties bloom in the spring on old stems. Generally speaking, pruning of these varieties is normally confined to what is referred to as "tidying." In early March, start pruning from the top down, removing only dead, weak or damaged stems to the highest pair of healthy buds. Depending on the age and variety of the plant, these buds may be only 2 or 3 feet above soil level.

Some popular varieties pruned in this way are:

- Dr. Ruppel
- Duchess of Edinburgh
- Elsa Spaeth
- General Sikorski
- Henryi
- Nelly Moser
- Ramona

**Pruning small-flowered clematis.** Small-flowered, late spring or early fall blooming clematis flower on new growth. Most of these plants are vigorous growers that will add up to 12 feet of new growth during a single growing season. It is desirable to remove all the old top growth that didn't die back naturally during the winter. These should be pruned hard in late winter or very early spring.

Start from the bottom and work up from healthy pairs of buds located 15 to 24 inches above soil level. If not pruned back hard, new wood will be produced on last year's vines resulting in a "lollipop" with few leaves and no flowers from ground level up to the new growth.

Popular clematis that benefit from this type of pruning are:

- Comtesse de Bouchaud
- Hagley Hybrid
- Jackmanni
- Niobe
- Sweet Autumn
- Tangutica, texensis
- Viticellas like Madame Julia de Correvon, Etoile Violette and Polish Spirit

**Exceptions.** There are a few exceptions to these rules. Some horticulturists suggest that during the first year after planting, you should not allow the clematis vine to grow more than 18 inches. You won't get any blooms, but this practice will help to develop a stronger root system. Then during the second year, allow them to grow.

This pruning philosophy follows a common held belief among clematis growers:

*The first year they sleep, the second year they creep and the third year they leap.*

Another exception to the pruning rules involves an established clematis plant that is well sited but not growing or blooming well. In the spring, prune the vine hard—to less than 12 inches, sometimes even to the ground. The vine will grow back, rejuvenated and more vigorous, just as shrubs do when pruned hard.

**Deadheading.** When your clematis is through blooming, deadhead the flowers if you wish to encourage repeat flowering rather than enjoying the sometimes very decorative seed heads

## Recommended Clematis

### Large-Flowered, Early Spring and Summer Blooming

#### White

- Duchess of Edinburgh—a double
- Gillian Blades
- Guernsey Cream—slightly yellow
- Henryi
- Snow Queen

#### Red

- Allanah
- Edward Markham
- Niobe
- Ville de Lyon

#### Blue

- Belle Nantaise—light blue, 9-inch diameter blooms
- Elsa Spaeth
- General Sikorski
- Will Goodwin

#### Purple

- Balfour
- Daniel Deronda
- Lady Betty

#### Pink

Pinks do best in a shadier location to minimize fading.

- Asao
- Hagley Hybrid
- Proteus—a double

## Stripes

- Dr. Ruppel—pink with a rose bar
- Kakio or Pink Champagne—dark pink with a rose bar
- Nelly Moser—light pink with a darker pink bar, fades badly in the sun
- Star of India—dark plum red with a dark pink bar

## Smaller-Flowered, Later Blooming

- Comtesse de Bouchaud—pink, vigorous grower
- Jackmanni—Both of these are profuse, long bloomers
  - Jackmanni—purple
  - Jackmanni Superba—purple, newer improved cultivar
- Sweet Autumn /Clematis terniflora—white, fragrant, vigorous grower
- Viticellas—Vigorous and colorful, the viticellas are virtually free of stem rot or wilt
  - Betty Corning—light lavender, bell-shaped flowers

- Madame Julia de Correvon—wine-red with yellow stamens
- Polish Spirit—purple
- Venosa Violacea—white flowers rimmed in purple

- Duchess of Albany/Clematis texensis—upright, bright pink tulip-shaped flowers

- Clematis tangutica—yellow, lantern-shaped blooms, decorative seed heads

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