

CHARMED BY CLEMATIS

Clematis, a magnificent climber, is truly international. There are over 400 wild varieties found in Europe, the Mediterranean countries, India, China, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and America. More than a century ago, dashing Victorian plant hunters brought many varieties back and hybridized them. Jackman's nursery once carried 343 different varieties. Unfortunately, clematis wilt, a disease still present today, decimated many of those varieties. Many gardeners refused to buy such fragile plants. It wasn't until after World War I and later that there was a major resurgence in breeding and an explosive crop of new hybrids emerged.

Clematis range in size from the ubiquitous Sweet Autumn (*C. Maximowicziana*) with its tiny, sweet-scented one-inch flowers to huge hybrids, such as 'Nelly Moser' with 6 to 8-inch flowers. Colors may be white, pink, blue, purple, and carmine as well as a brilliant combination of more than one. Most blooms last for more than a week in the home-



-if you can bring yourself to snip. The clematis does not cling by twining, tendrils, or special sucker roots. Instead, it bands by its foliage, which rapidly encircles any likely support. Except for the most rapacious varieties, such as Sweet Autumn, which can submerge everything in a blanket of sun-stopping vines, most clematis will not damage trees or bushes. The plant will perfectly embellish unsightly areas and add a burst of color and drama to the most mundane walls and fences. It can be combined with climbing roses to add a contrasting highlight.

Clematis prefer cool, moist, well-drained soil. Add plenty of peat moss or compost if the soil is sandy. Ideally,

plants should be set next to low ground cover, which will protect the roots while allowing stems and flowers plenty of sun. Train young shoots by tying them to supports. Propagate in the spring by layering and in the summer by stem cuttings under glass. Seed in the fall. Avoid moving plants once they are established in a location.

Pruning can be very tricky if you don't know which variety you own. It all relates to bloom time, so if you are not sure, wait a season and check your plant's blooming.

Spring bloomers (Group A), flower on last year's growth. They finish blooming in the spring and have a whole season to regroup for the following year. Vigorous growers can be cut back almost



to the ground after bloom. Prune slow growers much more cautiously a merely removing dead sections. Some varieties in this group are: *C. alpina*, *C. armandii*, *C. cirrhosa*, *C. macropetala*, and *C. montana*.



Plants with late spring-to-summer plus continuing sporadic blooms throughout the season (Group B) flower on both the old wood and the current season's growth. The largest flowers will emerge early in the season from old wood. Those that bloom on new shoots will be more prolific later in the season. One pruning approach is to thin out stems after the earliest flowers fade. Otherwise, prune gently while dormant or when just waking from dormancy. Some plants in this group are: *C. Florida* and large-flowered hybrid cultivars, such as *Bees' Jubilee*, *Elsa Späth*, *General Sikorski*, *Henryi*, *Nelly*

Moser, *Niobe*, *The President*, *Will Goodwin* and *Vyvyan Pennell*.

Late summer or fall bloomers (Group C) which bloom on the current year's growth can be pruned severely just before a season's growth period begins or after it has just started. This is essential for Sweet Autumn so that a deadwood undercoat from the past season won't bulk up vines. It's also the only way to keep this attractive, but voracious, plant within bounds. If you prefer to have your clematis ramble through a tree or bush, it needn't be pruned at all. Some plants in this group are: *C. X durandii*, *C. heracleifolia*, *C. orientalis*, *C. recta*, *C. tangutica*, *C. terniflora*, *C. texensis*, *C. viticella*, as well as large-flowered hybrid cultivars, such as: *Comtesse de Bouchaud*, *Ernest Markham*, *Gipsy Queen*, *Jackmanii*, *Lady Betty Balfour*, *Perle d'Azur*, and *Ville de Lyon*.



The worst clematis disease is still clematis wilt, caused by a fungus which thrives in damp weather. Foliage and stems whiten and turn black. The best thing to do is to immediately remove and destroy the affected stems. Clematis wilt does not attack the plant's roots, so most are likely to survive and re-bloom next year.

WHAT TO DO IN MID TO LATE JULY

Cut back strong shoots of wisteria.

Soak plants, trees, grass deeply once a week in dry conditions.

Sow seeds of such perennials as campanula, delphinium, dianthus, sweet william, English forget-me-not, and pansy.

Collect natural materials for dried bouquets.

Deadhead faded flowers.

Check tomato plants for aphids and horn worms.

Prune climbing roses after flowering.

Mulch shrub and flower borders.