

Supports should be at least 2/3 to 3/4 the ultimate height of the vine. Pergolas and arbors are good choices for vines taller than 10 feet. Use obelisks or trellises for shorter plants. Place the support 1 foot away from the base of the plant.

Plants can also be allowed to grow over fences, rock walls, deck rails, stumps, lamp posts, mail boxes, or columns, or to sprawl as a ground cover.

Care & Maintenance

Renew mulch in spring. Water during dry periods.

Although some clematis in a good location may do fine without any fertilization, you can use a balanced fertilizer once a year. Fertilize after first bloom for groups 1 and 2, and after pruning in spring for group 3. Heavy bloomers or especially vigorous growers may need more but be careful not to overfertilize. Don't fertilize when in bud or bloom.

Pruning Clematis

Prune to encourage new blooms, remove dead wood, direct growth, and control size. Wait until after growth resumes in spring when removing dead wood. Deadheading spring bloomers may encourage later rebloom of some varieties.

Old or overgrown clematis can be rejuvenated by cutting the plant back to just above the lowest bud in early spring. Group 1 plants will not bloom that season, however.

Timing and technique of pruning varies by group. Read your tag or plant description (or observe your plant) to determine which group your plant belongs to.

Group 1 - Remove only dead wood in spring. Prune after bloom if needed to reduce size, control growth, or make plant fuller. Prune no later than the end of July.

Group 2 - In early spring remove any dead wood and cut back to the topmost pair of live buds. You can prune hard after first bloom if desired.

Group 3 - Cut back in early spring before active growth begins. Prune just above the lowest living bud (usually 6-18 inches).

Potential Problems

Clematis is generally rather trouble-free. The biggest problem is clematis wilt. Plants may also be bothered by other diseases and pests, environmental issues, or poor location of plant.

Clematis wilt is caused by a fungus. It blocks the stem and prevents water and nutrients from reaching the upper plant, resulting in stem wilt and death. No varieties are immune but some are more resistant than others. Large-flowered varieties and young plants are the most susceptible.

Clematis wilt is often not fatal to the entire plant. Prune the affected stems 1 to 2 inches below the infected part and destroy the clippings. Planting deep helps the plant recover if it does become infected. Fungicides can be used as a preventative but will not help once the plant is infected.

A key to protecting plants from wilt and other problems is reducing stress by planting in the proper location and providing the right growing conditions. Provide consistent moisture and good air circulation and keep mulch away from stems. Try to prevent stem injury - the fungus needs a wound to enter the plant.

Sanitation is also important. Remove all plant debris in fall and destroy if there have been any disease problems.

For more information on gardening please visit:
<https://extension.illinois.edu/global/horticulture>

or call

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Clematis: Queen of the Vines



Garden Tips from Knox County Master Gardeners

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Clematis is a group of plants found in almost every area of the world, with about 300 species and thousands of hybrids. The name comes from the Greek word klema, meaning vine branch. Most are woody vines, but the genus also contains herbaceous and shrubby types.

Clematis produces attractive flowers in a variety of colors, sizes, and shapes. Some have contrasting stamens or attractive seedheads, which sometimes persist into winter. Flowers may attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Most varieties are deer and rabbit resistant.

Vining types can be used as a screen, focal point, or even as a groundcover. Shorter or herbaceous types can be used in borders. Use cut flowers or dried seedpods in arrangements.

Types of Clematis

We often think of ‘Jackmanii’ with its large purple blossoms or prolific sweet autumn clematis but there is a wide variety available.

Flower size varies from a diameter of less than an inch to 7 to 8 inches or larger. Small flowered varieties are often fragrant. Flowers can be single or double (or sometimes both on the same plant) and can hang downward or face upward. Flowers can be flat, tubular, or star, bell, or lantern shaped. Some plants have clusters of small flowers. Flower color can be white, yellow, pink, red, purple, lavender, blue, or bicolor. Bloom time and length varies with the group (see below) and individual variety.

Plant height can range from 2 to 30 feet. Large-flowered hybrids are usually 8 to 12 feet. Hardiness as well as growth habit and rate vary with species or variety.

Clematis Class or Group

Class refers to whether the plant blooms on new wood, old wood, or both, and affects the probability of flowering as well as pruning timing and technique. Class may also be referred to as pruning group, and should not be confused with terms such as Oriental Group or Astragene Group, which are used to classify or organize the many species and crosses of clematis.

Group 1 (A or no prune) - This group blooms on old wood in the spring, with flower buds forming in the fall. These may not reliably bloom in cold climates, as harsh winters may cause dieback.

Group 2 (B or half prune) - This group blooms on old wood in the spring and again on new wood in late summer or fall. If buds are killed by winter weather you will still get blooms later in the season. Some varieties produce double flowers on old wood and single on new wood.

Group 3 (C or hard prune) - This group blooms only on new wood with flower buds formed in the spring. It will bloom only at the end of the stems if not pruned back hard. Some varieties start blooming in mid-June and continue into fall. Group 3 clematis produce reliable bloom in this area and are easiest to prune.

Where to Plant

Preferred conditions may vary by species and cultivar. Clematis can be long-lived so choose the location carefully. Research your particular variety. Information should be available on plant tags or in catalogs.

Most varieties need at least 6 hours of sun but some tolerate (or prefer) more shade. Too much sun, especially hot late afternoon sun, may cause some colors (such as large red and blue or bi-color) to fade.

You may have heard the saying “head in the sun, feet in the shade” referring to clematis. Most prefer cool, moist, well-drained soil with slightly acidic to neutral pH. Shrubby and herbaceous varieties may be more drought tolerant. None of the clematis however like wet feet, particularly in winter.

Provide good air circulation but protect from strong winds to prevent damage to stems.

Choosing a Variety

While you may make your final choice based on color, size, or other characteristics, always be aware of the group. Groups 2 or 3 are the best choices in Central Illinois. If choosing a Group 1 variety you will need to provide winter protection or accept that it may not always bloom.

Other considerations include hardiness, disease resistance, size, growth habit, and conditions where it will be planted.

Flower color, size, and form are personal preference. Bloom time and length vary - choose varieties so you will have blooms all season.

Look for stocky, healthy, vigorous, multi-stemmed plants when purchasing.

There are hundreds to choose from. Look for some of the more unusual varieties. You may have to go beyond local nurseries or big box stores and look at specialty nurseries or online.

How to Plant

Spring is the best time to plant. You can also plant in early fall or summer if the plant is kept well-watered.

Before planting dig a large hole (about 2 feet deep and 2 to 3 feet wide). Add 1/3 by volume compost or well-rotted manure and mix well.

Most authorities recommend burying the plant anywhere from 1 to 6 inches (a suggestion of 2 to 4 inches is most common) or with 2 buds below the soil surface. This helps the plant recover from top damage, clematis wilt, or winter dieback by sending up new shoots from below. It also protects the crown in cold climates and encourages branching, multiple stems, and a fuller plant. This is most important for large-flowered hybrids. If at the time of planting there are new green shoots at the base, wait until they become woody before filling in with soil.

Use a starter fertilizer and water thoroughly. Keep well-watered until established.

Cut back after planting to prevent damage to the plant, stimulate root growth, and encourage branching. Prune to 12 inches the first two years (only the first year for Group 1), and after that prune according to group.

To shade roots add mulch or plant ground cover, annuals, or low-growing perennials or shrubs around the base. Keep mulch 8 inches away from stems to help prevent clematis wilt and other fungal diseases.

Supporting Clematis

Clematis climb by twining, using petioles or leaf stems - they cannot “grab” onto a surface. They may need a bit of help and guidance, especially in the beginning, and do best with thin supports. If the support is greater than 3/4 inch in diameter add twine, heavy knotted fishing line, wire screening, nylon netting, or wooden lathe to help vines climb. A few, such as *C. x durrandii*, have long stems but are non-twining and may need to be tied to the support or just allowed to scramble horizontally.