

CLEMATIS: VINE FOR EFFICIENT LANDSCAPES

By DOUGLAS J. CHAPMAN



Dutchess of Edinburgh blooms on wood from the previous season.

Clematis was originally introduced to the Americas by the late Colonel J.E. Springer. Clematis can be a colorful find, depending on the type, from May through October.

Generally, clematis does have a problem if planted in wet, poorly-drained soils but, if planted in well-drained, moist loamy soils, clematis thrives.

Clematis prefer limestone or alkaline soils with a pH from 7 to 7.5, although it has been noted to grow in pH as low as 5. But grow and thrive are two separate conditions.

One should consider planting in conditions from partial (80%) to full sun. To discourage problems, heavy organic mulching is important. This not only keeps the roots cool but also provides additional moisture; notwithstanding, clematis is a vine that likes frequent watering or, minimally, high humidity. The most significant disease problems are leaf spot and stem rot which often cause the plant to de-

cline or die out. These problems are only significant when the clematis is planted in poorly-drained-wet soil or in very shady conditions.

The clematis should be grouped into two classes—plants that bloom on previous season's wood (should be pruned after flowering) and plants that bloom on current season's wood (can be pruned during the spring).

Those that bloom on previous season's wood include *Clematis macropetala*, *C. montana*, and the cultivars 'Duchess of Edinburgh' and 'Nelly Moser.'

The clematis that are probably the most effective and easiest to culture include the ones that bloom on current season's wood, e.g. *C. jacmanii*, *C. peniculata*, *C. texensis*, and *C. viticella*. Several of the cultivars include 'The President,' 'Lord Neville,' *jackmanii* 'Superba,' and 'Picadilly.' A detailed look at several of the individual types will help give us an idea

about culture and general aggressiveness in the garden.

The native Scarlet Clematis (*C. texensis*) is a vine, reaching 6 feet in height with bright scarlet bell-shaped flowers which one can expect to see blooming from July through the first frost. Its bell-shaped flowers are exciting. This vine is perfectly hardy from Texas to Central Maine. The fruit are typical prune-shaped seeds which can give additional effectiveness during the mid to late fall months.

Sweetautumn Clematis (*C. paniculata* or *C. dioscoreifolia robusta*), an introduction from Japan, is probably the most aggressive and landscape effective of the clematis plants. It is not uncommon for Sweetautumn Clematis to reach 30 ft. in height, blooming in late August on current season's wood. The

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white 1½- to 2-in. flowers, borne in terminal panicles, are particularly effective, giving a white carpeted feeling to the entire area. In addition to the profuse, fragrant flowers of late summer and early fall, the seeds can be somewhat effective. But this aggressive vine must be kept in check.

Big-Petal Clematis (*C. macropetala*), a hardy native of Northern China through Siberia, is a subdued vine, reaching 10 ft. in height. It flowers during the spring and, therefore, the flowers are borne on previous season's wood. These blue 2- to 4-in. diameter flowers can be particularly interesting—a unique addition in the gardens, growing on yew branches or old pine roots, being effective early in the season. Wyman suggests the flowers are somewhat distinct as the center of each blossom is filled with numerous petal segments, giving it a rather dense texture.

Pink Clematis (*C. montana rubens*) is a vine, reaching 24 ft. in

height. The 2- to 2½-in. rosy-red to dull pink flowers initially appear in May and bloom through much of the summer. This native of Central to Western China was introduced by E.H. Wilson. It flowers on previous season's wood but can be a hardy, exciting addition for much of the summer.

Another native, Virgin's Bower (*C. virginiana*), is a tight vine, growing 12 to 20 ft. in height. It has bright green foliage throughout the summer. The white flowers which are borne on large panicles become effective and remain effective from July through September. This vine is native from Georgia through Nova Scotia.

Italian Clematis (*C. viticella*), with its rosy-purple flowers, 1½ to 2-in. in diameter, is effective from June through August.

Some of our favorite varieties include 'Henry' - clear white, 'The President' - a medium blue, 'Piccadilly' - pale violet, *jackmanii* 'Superba' - a dark, rich red to violet, and 'Nelly Moser' - a pink clematis.

tis.

There are several nurseries who have been leaders in the development of clematis. In the U.S., Steffan's Nursery of Fairport, New York, offers many of the species and cultivars of clematis which are hardy throughout the Northeast. In the United Kingdom, the nursery "Treasures of Tenbury," managed by Raymond Evison, is a standout. They not only have the most current techniques as far as propagation and production are concerned, but he has recently completed a visit to China, looking for new species for introduction and hybridizing which may add to the many offerings of this rich, colorful vine.

Clematis, when used in companion with other plants, can be an excellent addition to our already varied landscape without increasing maintenance costs. It can add color in a period when we don't have color and be relatively low maintenance. Clematis is a major group of vines which is almost unknown in the United States. **WTT**

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