

Growing Clematis

Clematis: A vine for all gardens

Whether you pronounce it KLEM-ah-tis or klem-AH-tis, with flowers in all shapes and sizes (up to a whopping 9 inches in diameter) and a dizzying array of colors, clematis are anything but boring! Unfortunately too many would-be fanciers have become discouraged with what seems to be confusing and complicated instructions for growing and pruning. In this Gro-Sheet we have tried to condense and simplify the few cultural requirements you need to know in order to assure success with clematis. Remember, a little time spent now will be rewarded with years of satisfaction.

Planting and Growing Clematis: A short course

First, clematis need a minimum of 4 hours of sunlight to perform well and while some varieties will take considerably more sun, bear in mind that the summer sun in Contra Costa can fade the beautiful blossom colors prematurely. In general, the smaller flowered varieties withstand the sun better. Try planting the large flowered ones in a spot where they will receive some light afternoon shade. Secondly, clematis need cool soil for their root zone. This can be provided by applying a heavy mulch of organic material or stones or by planting shrubs and perennials at the base of the vine to provide shade.

Clematis require rich, loose, well-drained soil with a neutral pH. Provide the newly planted vine with a large, well cultivated hole and bury the top of the root ball and stem 2-3" deep! (Yes, this is contrary to everything you've ever been told about keeping the crown, of any plant, level or above the soil grade, but trust us on this one.)

Water deeply and regularly during the bloom and growth periods.

Fertilize with a 5-10-10 (Rose or Vegetable-type) formula in early spring and again after pruning has been completed and new growth is beginning. An application of well rotted manure can be substituted in late winter or early spring.

Clematis can be grown virtually anywhere in the landscape so this is one area where your imagination and creativity can run wild. As they grow, the vines will need something to support them, typically a fence, arbor or trellis (provide adequate ventilation by keeping space between the trellis and wall—about 4-6"). Another method, borrowed from European gardens, is to slant the vine next to a shrub or tree which will act as the support. Conifers such as a cypress, yew or sequoia make beautiful hosts while large evergreen or deciduous shrubs such as rhododendron and lilac are equally popular.

Pruning Clematis:

The three main groups

Clematis are divided into 3 main groups for the convenience of identifying their flowering habits and pruning requirements.

Group One consists of species which produce their main bloom between March and June on flower stalks produced the previous season. This group includes the evergreen *C. armandii* and the popular *C. montana* and its cultivars. Pruning on these species should be done immediately after flowering so that the new growth can create flower buds which will bloom the following spring. Pruning should include removal of all dead and weak stems. Also, plants which have outgrown their allotted space can be thinned or pruned heavily at this time.



Here are some of the **Group One** plants we have carried:

Clematis armandii	EVERGREEN CLEMATIS	white
Clematis armandii ‘Hendersonii Rubra’	HENDERSON PINK EVERGREEN CLEMATIS	pink
Clematis chrysocoma ‘Rosea’ (C. spooneri).....	PINK GOLDWOOL CLEMATIS	pink
Clematis dioscoreifolia (C. paniculata).....	SWEET AUTUMN CLEMATIS	white
Clematis macropetala.....	DOWNEY CLEMATIS	lavender to powder-blue
Clematis montana var. rubens	PINK ANEMONE CLEMATIS	fragrant, pink
Clematis montana var. rubens ‘Alba’	WHITE ANEMONE CLEMATIS	fragrant, white
Clematis montana ‘Wilsonii’	WILSON ANEMONE CLEMATIS	white

Group Two species also produce their bloom on stems which grew the previous year. This group includes many of the popular large flowered cultivars which bloom before the end of June. Again pruning on this group follows immediately after the spring bloom—remove all dead and weak stems and shorten the remainder by 6-10”, or to where a strong pair of axial buds are present. Many in this group can bloom a second time in late summer or fall.

Here are some **Group Two** plants we have carried:

Clematis ‘Barbara Dibley’ (Patens Group).....	large, petunia red
Clematis ‘The President’ (Patens Group)	rich purple
Clematis henryi (C. x lawsoniana ‘Henryi’)	large, white
Clematis ‘Candida’ (Lanuginosus Group)	large, white with yellow stamens
Clematis ‘Elsa Spaeth’ (Lanuginosus Group).....	large, lavender-blue
Clematis ‘Nelly Moser’ (Lanuginosus Group)	large, mauve striped with dark red

Group Three contains the clematis which bloom on new stems each year. The previous year’s growth is therefore useless and is removed to generate and make room for the current season’s growth. Pruning is done in February, as buds begin to swell, and consists of removing all stems to within 1-2 feet of the soil level—make your cuts just above strong axial leaf buds. This hard pruning will also encourage many new shoots to sprout from below the soil surface.

Here are some **Group Three** examples:

Clematis ‘Gipsy Queen’	large, velvety purple
Clematis ‘Hagley Hybrid’	shell pink
Clematis ‘Ramona’ (Lanuginosus Group)	large, lavender-blue
Clematis ‘Lady Betty Balfour’ (Viticella Group).....	fragrant, dark blue to purple range
Clematis ‘Jackmanii’ (C. x jackmanii).....	rich purple
Clematis ‘Comtesse de Bouchaud’ (C. x jackmanii)	mauve-pink

For further information on this fascinating genus, we recommend ‘*Clematis For Everyone*’ by Raymond J. Evison