

All about clematis

Story by Shauna Dobbie, photos by Rob Wein



C. alpina 'Helsingborg'.



C. armandii evergreen.



C. cirrhosa 'Freckles'.

Where to start with clematis?

The ones you see are mostly the big-flowered trollops that clamber up a trellis, but there are many other types: small-flowered, multi-petalled and drooping bell-flowered examples, a couple of them native. Some don't climb but grow as small bushes. There are even evergreen types, though those will only grow on the West Coast.

Different clematis bloom in spring, summer and fall and some will bloom in spring and fall. People always worry about when to prune a clematis; the answer is different, depending on when it blooms. Some bloom on new wood, some on old wood, and some on both. The ones that bloom on both new and old wood might do so at the same time or might do so at different times of the year.

Three pruning types

Sources will tell you there are three pruning types.

Group 1 blooms very early on old wood. Prune these immediately after they bloom, but only if you need to for shape or to control the size.

Group 2 blooms on both old and new wood. You can prune these a wee bit in spring to promote branching.

Group 3 blooms on new wood, later in the season. Go ahead and

hack at them in the early spring, to four or six inches from the ground.

If you aren't sure what type of clematis you have, wait a year to see when it blooms; then you'll know for next year. Or maybe you won't. Don't get fussed. If you leave it a couple of years, or even a few years, it will continue to bloom. If the blooming slows down from year to year, you know you need to prune it in early spring.

I have only one clematis, but it is a beauty. I didn't know what cultivar it was until researching this story; it appears to be 'Bourbon', which puts it into Group 2. I've never pruned it. Maybe I'll give it a bit of attention next spring.

Caring for them

All clematis like full sun but shaded roots, so consider putting a small shrub south of them or mulching well.

Most of them climb by having their leaves wrap around thin supports. A thick trellis of 1 3/4-inch slats won't work, at least not without some help. To get a clematis to climb a wall or a lamp post, you'll have to attach netting to it. (Paint the netting the same colour and you'll hardly notice it.) They also like to climb through shrubs, which most won't hurt, except *C. terniflora* and *C. virginiana*; these two are too vigorous for most shrubs and trees.

One thing to watch for is clematis wilt, a fungal pathogen. The

wilt occurs very quickly, causing a branch to turn black. If you see it, cut the branch back to a healthy bit and bin the diseased portion. Hopefully you've saved the rest of the plant. Keep an eye on the plant and breathe easy; clematis wilt usually won't kill an entire plant.

Species

There are at least 300 different species of clematis, with hybrids and cultivars besides. There are species native to Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa and, of course, North America. Those grown in gardens are from a much smaller selection of species, including these:

C. alpina, native to Europe. Cultivars include pink 'Constance' and purple 'Helsingborg'. 'Stolwicz's Gold' has purple flowers with gorgeous yellow foliage.

C. armandii, native to China, are evergreen. Recommended for higher Zones. Cultivars include the white 'Snowdrift' and white tinged with pink 'Apple Blossom', both hardy to Zone 7.

C. cirrhosa is native to the Mediterranean and requires a Mediterranean climate. An evergreen species, it has gorgeous cultivars like the pink-spotted 'Freckles' and 'Balearica', both hardy to Zone 8.

C. integrifolia, native to Europe and Asia and extremely hardy. This



C. integrifolia 'Durandii'.



C. macropetala 'Markhams Pink'.



C. viticella 'Purpurea Plena Elegans'.

is one of the parents of 'Jackmannii', the well-known deep purple that was the first clematis to hit the big time in retail sales, back in the 1800s. Other cultivars are the non-climbing blue 'Durandii' and the pure white 'Alba'.

C. macropetala, native to Mongolia and Siberia. This one is very hardy too. Look for the cultivars 'Maidwell Hall' or 'Pauline' in lavender blue and, in a lighter lavender, 'Wesselton'. 'Markham's Pink' is the palest tint of pink. All are nodding, lantern-shaped types.

C. montana, native to Asian areas from Afghanistan to Taiwan. The specific epithet 'montana' refers to the mountains, not the State. Some of the clematis descended from it are the white 'Alexander', double-petalled pink 'Broughton Star', and pink 'Tetrarose'.

C. tangutica, native to Central Asia, this one is particularly nota-

ble for having yellow flowers. Cultivars include 'Aureolin' and 'Golden Harvest'. 'My Angel' is a particularly striking cultivar with downward facing lily-shaped flowers tinged rose on the outside and yellow on the inside.

C. terniflora, native to northeast Asia. This pretty, small white clematis has been naturalized through the eastern US but has become invasive in Florida.

C. texensis, native to Texas. It has rather tough petals but has proven useful as a parent to some crosses. 'Duchess of Albany' is pink with darker pink bands down the centres of the petals, 'Princess Diana' is rosy-pink, and 'Etoile Rose' is deep pink with lighter margins.

C. viticella, native to Europe. It has been popular in English gardens for hundreds of years. Cultivars include the deep purple 'Polish Spirit', double magenta

'Purpurea Plena Elegans' and red 'Madame Julia Correvon'.

Native North American

C. occidentalis, native to southern Canada and northern US. The flowers are sparser on the vine than others, so this is a rare choice for nurseries. Still, you might be able to find it at a nursery specializing in native plants. The big blooms range from purplish blue to reddish blue and occasionally white.

C. virginiana is native to Canada from Newfoundland to southern Manitoba, and through the US to the Gulf of Mexico. It is an aggressive grower covered in starry white flowers and can scramble up trees as high as 20 feet. If you want this plant, go to a nursery specializing in natives. *C. terniflora* is often mistaken for *C. virginiana*, both going by the common names of virgin's bower and sweet autumn clematis. 🌿



C. macropetala 'Markhams Pink'.



C. tangutica 'Golden Harvest'.



C. texensis 'Etoile Rose'.

Selected clematis hybrids

'Barbara Jackman': Pink with darker band on the petals.

'Belle of Woking': Fully double and almost-white, silvery-blue.

'Blue Light': Fully double light blue.

'Comtesse de Bouchard': Beautiful light pink.

'Elsa Spath': Rich violet blue, lightening toward the petal centres.

'Ernest Markham': Big, reliable magenta flowers.

'General Sikorski': Medium purple flowers.

'Guernsey Cream': Creamy white flowers with creamy white centres.

'Mrs. Cholmondely': Light lavender blue has stood the test of time, developed 120 years ago.

'Nelly Moser': Another oldie, this one is pink with darker red centre bars.

'Niobe': Beautiful dark red with yellow stamens.

'Snow Queen': Beautiful white with magenta-tipped stamens.

'Star of India': Dating back to the 1860s with reddish-purple flowers.

'Ville de Lyon': Another from the turn of the last century, this has red flowers lightening toward the centre and yellow stamens.



'Belle of Woking'.



'Comtesse de Bouchard'.



'Elsa Spath'.



'Snow Queen'.

Canadian-bred clematis



Clematis Vancouver 'Cotton Candy'.



Clematis Vancouver 'Mystic Gem'.



Clematis Vancouver 'Danielle'.

Clearview Horticultural Products in Langley, BC, has bred several varieties of clematis. Known as the Vancouver series, they've developed big-flowering beauties such as the enchanting

'Fragrant Star', a white with burgundy-tipped stamens and a vanilla scent.

Fred Wein Sr, an original owner of the more than 50-year-old company, devotes most of his time now to breeding clematis while the younger

members of the family are dedicated to the rest of the business. Operating mostly as a wholesale grower, they have a garden shop you can drop in on if you get to the Lower Mainland of BC.