



## CLEMATIS CULTURE and CARE

By Norm Phillips, UC Master Gardener

Clematis refers to a single diverse genus of plants. The Clematis genus includes over 300 species and thousands of hybrids. These are prized for their abundant and showy flowers with a myriad of choices in flowers (shape, color and form), seasonal interest (timing in flowering, evergreen or deciduous) and growth habit (vines and some shrubs).

Flower sizes range from over six inches in diameter to less than an inch. Clematis flower shapes are equally diverse and include bell, star, urn and tubular forms. Some flowers hang and others face upward. Different species and their hybrids bloom at different times of the year.

**PLANTING AND LOCATION:** Clematis need bright sunlight for at least six hours, and cool, shaded soil for roots. They grow best when planted in areas where the top of the plant is exposed to full sunlight and the lower portion of the plant is in shade. Dig a hole at least 18" to 24" deeper than the root ball of the plant. Soil amendment can be added to the planting hole to insure a loose nutrient rich soil. Mix in a few handfuls of bone meal or a cup of super phosphate. Position the plant into the hole so the crown of the plant is four to six inches below the depth of the surrounding soil. If the plant has new tender green growth at the base wait until the growth becomes woody before placing soil against the stem. Water and cover with a thick layer of mulch. Sometimes flat rocks are placed over the root zone to keep roots cool.

Evergreen types are planted without any pruning requirements; just tie and start training shoots. Deciduous vining type stems should be cut back to 2-3 growth buds, about 10-12" from the ground. Late in the next dormant season cut back first year's growth to 2 or 3 pairs of buds and train the new shoots as they start to grow.

**GROWING REQUIREMENTS:** Plant vining types next to fences, trellis, tree trunks or other support structures to allow for twining. Plant in rich, well drained soil with of abundant organic matter content. Adequate moisture is essential during our hot seasons. Keep the soil moist but not wet.

**FEEDING CLEMATIS:** Be patient with clematis; they often take two or three years after planting before they grow and flower profusely. In the meantime supply nutrients for healthy growth and abundant blooms. Each spring add a balanced plant food around the root zone and mix in the soil. Feed each month with a complete plant food since clematis need a constant supply of nutrients during the growing season. Do not feed clematis during its flowering season.

**TYPES AND VARIETIES:** Clematis are divided into evergreen and deciduous plants and most species can be divided into three groups; *Early-Flowering species*, *Mid-Season species* and *Late-Flowering species*.

**DECIDUOUS and EVERGREEN VARIETIES:** Over 300 varieties of clematis are available for the gardener. Most nurseries only carry a few of these varieties. Deciduous large flowering hybrid clematis are the most popular today. These old favorites and new varieties make up most of the varieties found in the nurseries today. The variety 'Henry' is a favorite white flowering clematis. Several newer white types are now available. 'Romona' is a popular medium blue variety, 'Lincoln Star' is a good pink variety, while 'Red Cardinal' is a proven red performer. Clematis x jackmanii and its offspring varieties are the most popular purple type while Bicolor 'Nelly Moser' (purplish pink with red center) holds it's own in gardens everywhere. Check with your nurseryman for the new hybrids introduced this year.

Clematis armandii is the most popular evergreen and is considered an early-flowering species. Leaves are divided into three glossy dark green leaflets that droop downward. Clusters of white fragrant flowers cover the vine in early spring. Careful selection of soil and water is important to prevent leaf margin and tip burn from excess salt.

### Early-flowering Species and Cultivars

Clematis in this group include the species *C. alpina*, *C. armandii*, *C. macropetala*, *C. montana* and their cultivars.

Early-flowering clematis bear flowers on last year's growth. Flower buds then open in winter or early spring. Prune after flowering to remove dead or damaged stems. If you need to reduce the size of the plant, cut back stems at this time. Only minimum pruning is necessary for this group of clematis.

### Mid-Season, Large-flowering Species and Cultivars (all are deciduous)

Included in this category are popular cultivars of 'President', 'Nelly Moser', and 'Henri'. Many cultivars of *C. jackmanii* are also in this group.

Blooming late spring and early summer, this group bears flowers on side shoots off last year's growth. Typically a late season flush of blooms are produced in late August or September on the tips of the current year's growth. Pruning on these clematis needs to be done before growth begins in early spring. Remove all dead or damaged stems. Then cut back the remaining stems growth to swollen growth or flower buds. The flowers should be removed after fading

These clematis have flowers that are large, saucer-shaped and showy. Flower types include single, semi-double and double. Since the double-flowering types require mature stems to produce its large, pom-pom looking flower, it is essential to keep pruning to a minimum. New, immature growth produces only single-layered flowers. If your doubled-flowered cultivar produces a second flush of bloom in autumn, the flowers will be single. Cultivars of double-flowered clematis include 'Multiblue', 'Belle of Woking', and 'Duchess of Edinburgh'.

### Late-Flowering Species and Cultivars

Popular clematis in this group includes the species and cultivars of *C. Jackmanii*, *C. paniculata*, *C. orientalis*, *C. texensis* and *C. viticella*.

These clematis bloom only on current season's new growth. They flower mid-to late-summer and continue into the fall. To encourage a lot of new growth, prune these clematis each year in late winter or early spring. Before new growth occurs, cut stems back to a pair of strong buds, six to twelve inches above the ground. It is better to prune in the spring then not at all.

**PESTS AND DISEASES:** Pests of clematis vary from slugs, earwigs to deer and rabbit. Slugs feed on young shoots, growth buds and flower buds and can be a major problem. Bait applied around the plant's base can keep damage to a minimum. Earwigs attack flowers and buds creating patchwork flowers. Usually they are more a nuisance than anything else and treatment is not necessary.

Clematis wilt is a problem common to clematis. This term is applied to a number of diseases that produce similar symptoms. These symptoms include spotting along the leaf margin, stem blight, leaf drop, or wilt of the leaves and stem above the point of infection. This infection usually occurs near the base of the plant. Control of wilt is prevented by good cultural practices as outlined above. If wilt occurs on your plant, cut it one-inch below where the infection or wound appears. This is a sporadic disease caused by late rains, high plant population, high humidity and stressed plants.

