

Garden Center Guides



Clematis

Clematis is a large genus of more than 200 species, both tender and hardy. While most are hardy from zones 6 through 9, some varieties of this woody, deciduous vine do well in zones 4 and 5. As

a general rule, clematis grows in full or partial sun, although some varieties do well in light shade. Clematis vines grow from 6- to 20-feet long, depending on variety. They need support to vine and display flowers. The support structure should be no thicker than the size of a pencil. During early growth, the small plant may need a little guidance to begin its climb on the structure. If supported next to a masonry wall, plant out at least 12 inches to allow for air circulation and loss of moisture to the foundation.

Varieties

There are two general categories of clematis: large flowering, which bloom in May and June, and small flowering, which bloom in late summer and early fall. Of the small flowering, a favorite is 'Sweet autumn', *C. terniflora*. The small flowering clematis is easy to care for, grow rapidly, and produce large amounts of flowers. The small flowering clematis can be cut 12 inches from the ground in early spring because they bloom on the current year's growth.

'Nellie Moser', *C. florida*, a commonly grown large flower variety, performs as well in shade as alpine varieties. The larger flower types are the first to flower. The large flowering varieties bloom on last year's wood, and should be pruned shortly after flowering to allow for new shoots and blooms the following year. Pruning this group is done mainly to remove old, unsightly wood and to shape the plant. At times the tangled vines look a little overwhelming.

Care

Clematis prefer cool, rich and moist soil. The soil should be deep and amended with equal parts of well-rotted manure, peat moss and soil. The planting hole should be 18 inches wide and deep. Place the young clematis 1 to 2 inches deeper than it was grown in the container to protect the fragile stems and allow for resprouting if damage occurs. Backfill the hole with the amended soil to give the roots a well-drained, but moisture-retentive soil to get started. Incorporate starter fertilizer or bone meal according to directions and continue feeding monthly the first year with 1-1-1 ratio water soluble, slow-released fertilizer. The plant should be kept moist and not allowed to dry out. After plants are established, a spring and fall feeding from well-rotted manure or compost is adequate, and normal rainfall usually is sufficient except for periods of drought. In hot, dry weather, soak the plant once or twice a week.

Newly planted clematis should be pruned hard – 12 to 18 inches from the ground – the first spring after planting. This will encourage a stronger, more heavily branched plant base. Clematis roots like it cool. Shade the soil with a flat stone, loose mulch, or low-growing shrubs or groundcover.

Pests

Clematis has few insect or disease problems. Clematis wilt, known as stem rot, is a fungal disease that causes the plant to droop and turn black. Cutting the diseased stems back and removing will allow the plant to resprout.

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