Growing Wisteria

Wisteria is a vigorous, twining vine that is hardy and long-lived. Gardeners need space for this plant because it can vine up to 25 feet and requires support. The two species commonly grown in gardens are Chinese wisteria, *Wisteria sinensis*, and Japanese wisteria, *Wisteria floribunda*. Grafted wisterias, or those grown from cuttings, are a better choice than those grown from seed. Vegetatively propagated plants can be expected to bloom while relatively young. Plants grown from seed can take many years to bloom.

Chinese wisteria produces 6- to 12-inch flower clusters and blooms in mid-May. The flowers all open at once for a showy display. The flowers are slightly fragrant and violet-blue. There is also a more fragrant white variety. This plant may flower three to four years after planting.

Japanese wisterias grow to 25 feet and have violet-blue fragrant flowers. Flowers open gradually from the base to the tip in 12- to 18-inch-long clusters. The Japanese species comes in a broad range of colors such as red, purple, white and rose.

Site preparation

Wisterias require full sun (six or more hours of direct sun per day) and deep, moderately fertile soil that will not dry out excessively. They prefer neutral to slightly acidic soil and require some type of support. The soil pH and fertility can be determined by a soil test through your local K-State Research and Extension office.

Wisterias climb on wire frames, trellises, arbors and pergolas. Prepare the soil in an area at least 3 feet in diameter and 18 inches deep. Amend soil with either one-third peat moss, cotton boll compost, or well rotted manure. In heavy clay soils, amending with organic matter is not recommended because backfill will create a sunken area that can fill with water and drown the plant. In this situation, use the original soil when planting. Plant the root ball no deeper than in the nursery. If the wisteria is grafted, the graft should be planted about an inch below the soil line. After planting, water the entire area well, and then provide the equivalent of 1 inch of water per week until the plant is established. Wisteria plants can be fertilized annually until they reach maturity. Then fertilize as needed based on foliage color. Foliage should be dark green.

If a wisteria plant fails to bloom, the cause could be severe winter temperatures, which injure flower buds, or too much vegetative growth. Summer pruning will help keep vigorous vegetation under control. Excessive nitrogen fertilizing also encourages vegetative growth.

Pruning

Wisteria need pruning to maintain plant quality. Late winter pruning will help maintain control and encourage blooming. To grow as a single stem, the plant should be staked in an upright position and the top cut off after reaching 4 to 6 feet. Late winter pruning is done only to train the framework. Side shoots can be trimmed back in the summer and lower branches removed as the plant grows. Remove suckers that grow from the base of the plant.

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