

Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

FACT SHEET



Have Gardening Questions? The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).

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Clematis Vines

Clematis vines are among the most versatile and beautiful plants you can grow in your garden. They come in a wide array of colors and sizes, from 20-foot vines dangling fragrant pink flowers in early spring (Clematis montana rubens 'Oderata') to compact growers covered in pale blue blooms, perfect for containers (Clematis 'Cezanne'). Clematis is surprisingly easy to grow in a variety of garden sites. There are clematis for sun (Clematis texensis 'Princess Diana') and clematis that thrive in the shade (Clematis 'Nelly Moser', 'Fairy Queen' and Clematis vitacella 'Etoile Violette'). Gardeners new to clematis should seek out some of the smaller flowering cultivars, such as Clematis 'Betty Corning', 'Alba Luxurians' and 'Purpurea Plena Elegans', which are easy to grow, have long bloom times, shade tolerance, and wilt resistance.

Planting: Proper planting of clematis will ensure many years of enjoyment and bloom. Dig a hole 2'x2' and work in plenty of organic matter in the form of compost, humus or well-rotted manure. A handful of peat moss will help with water retention. Place the vine so the crown of the plant sits 2-3 inches below the soil line and only a few leaf buds are above ground. Backfill and water deeply and regularly for the first year while the plant develops its root system. After the first year 1 inch of water a week will suffice. Fertilize with either a 10-10-10 slow release fertilizer or rose food once in the early spring and once again in the early summer.

Container Gardening: Recently, many clematis hybrids have been introduced expressly for containers. They offer compact growth (under 6 ft.) and long bloom times. Plant them in 18-inch containers, and remember to fertilize and water more frequently than vines planted in the ground. Clematis 'Crystal Fountain' and 'Rosemoor' are two good choices. Winter-proof containers may be left outside year round.

Pruning: Clematis is routinely pruned to maximize flower production, but is not necessary for the health of the plant. Clematis vines that bloom very early in the year flower on

old wood and are labeled Group 1. These vines do not require pruning except to remove dead/diseased wood or to control vigorous growth (Clematis montana, Clematis alpina, Clematis macropetala). Follow the adage, "If it blooms before June, don't prune".

Clematis that bloom late in the season, (C. vitacella, C. texensis, C. 'Jackmannii,' and the popular C. terniflora or Sweet Autumn) flower on new wood. These are labeled Group 3 and can be hard pruned, meaning cut back all top growth to 8-12 inches above the ground in late winter or early spring.

Clematis that bloom in late spring and again in the summer are blooming on both new and old wood and are labeled Group 2. No pruning is necessary for this group, although some gardeners will cut back about a third of the plant to stimulate new growth. Regardless of pruning group, NEVER prune any clematis in the fall as you may stimulate new growth that will be susceptible to winter damage.

Diseases: The two main afflictions of clematis plants are powdery mildew and wilt. Powdery mildew, a gray fuzzy coating that will cause eventual browning of lower leaves, is an indication that the foliage has been wet while the roots have been dry. Deep watering will alleviate this. Wilt is a fungal disease that enters the vine through a cut or break. The afflicted vines will display droopy leaves (as if thirsty) that will rapidly progress to complete browning and death of all top growth. Cut off all affected parts of the vine, cutting back to the ground if necessary, and dispose of them in the trash not the compost pile. If your clematis was planted deeply and is otherwise healthy, it should start to put out new growth within the season. Always sanitize clippers (by dipping in a bleach solution) before and after pruning to stop the spread of disease, and practice good garden sanitation, cleaning up all plant debris.

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>