

Growing Clematis in Montana



Clematis are the aristocrats of climbers; their rich colors and varied bloom times enable the gardener to have masses of bloom from spring to fall. To accomplish this, varieties with different bloom times can be grown together or planted in complimentary areas of the garden. Clematis can be chosen to enrich any garden to provide a full growing season of interest. In the fall, feathery seed heads follow the clematis' tropical-like flowers, often lasting into winter.



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Growing Conditions — The old adage of “their heads in the sun and their feet in the shade” holds true for all clematis in our climate. The tops prefer 5 to 6 hours of sunlight while their roots prefer cool and damp (but not soggy) conditions. To achieve this, shade the roots with shallow rooted plantings at its base or with a thick layer of mulch. Avoid planting your clematis in an extremely hot, sunny area or where it will receive a great deal of reflective heat. An area where it receives all day, filtered sun or morning sun is ideal. Clematis vines climb by wrapping their leaf stalks around a support. Thin wooden stakes, wire or mesh trellises, and chain-link fences provide the right conditions for easy climbing.

Planting — Clematis need to be planted in cool, moist, deep, well drained soil. They require plenty of water and regular, balanced feeding. A little special preparation will ensure the proper environment. Dig a hole eighteen inches deep by eighteen inches wide. Cover the bottom with a good rich compost or well-rotted manure. A hand full of bone meal mixed with your soil is always a good idea. Add enough topsoil to cover the compost: now you are ready to plant. Place your well-watered clematis in the hole so that several inches of stem is below the soil line (provided the stem has become a bit woody). Back fill with good quality topsoil. Young plants that have green succulent stems need to be planted deep, but not back filled until the stem becomes woody which can take six or seven months.

Pruning — There is quite a bit of confusion about how to prune clematis. It is actually quite simple if you know what variety of clematis you have. If your clematis is pruned wrong, the plant will not be damaged, but it may not flower as well as it would otherwise. If all varieties of clematis were left unpruned, they would all flower very well. However, the flowers would not necessarily cover the plant as well as they could and you may have a vine that quickly becomes out of control. There are basically 3 pruning groups:

- **Group A** — Varieties that produce flowers on previous year's growth. We will not discuss this group because they are not hardy in our area.
- **Group B1** — Normal blooming patterns for this group consist of a heavy flush of flowers in May-June on the previous season's growth followed by a second smaller flush of blooms in September on the current season's growth. The first February or March after planting, cut back the clematis close to the ground leaving two sets of buds on each stem between where you make your cut and soil level. In subsequent years a light pruning with some variation in the length of the stems will help produce a well-balanced vine. Any weak or dead wood should be removed. You can also simplify your pruning by cutting the entire plant to 3 feet above ground. If your clematis has been neglected for several years, it can be rejuvenated by severely cutting back to the ground.
- **Group B2** — Varieties that bloom simultaneously on last year's growth and the current season's growth. These varieties normally bloom from June to September continuously. The first February or March after planting, cut back the clematis close to the ground leaving two sets of buds on each stem between where you make your cut and soil level. In subsequent years follow pruning directions for either group B1 or C.
- **Group C** — These varieties bloom only on the current year's growth from early summer to fall. Plants should be cut back in late February or March of each year to two strong sets of buds on each stem 6 inches from ground level. This will provide a plant with blooms that start near ground level and continue to the top of the plant. If you would like your Group C clematis to start blooming at a higher level, like the top of a fence, prune it to that height.

Fertilizing — In the early spring as soon as new shoots begin to grow is the time to begin feeding your clematis. A generous mulch of compost mixed with a handful of bone meal worked into the soil is a good way to start. Once your clematis is actively growing an application of a general-purpose liquid fertilizer every two weeks will help get your plant underway. A fertilizer designed to set fruit on vegetables or produce flowers in the garden will give you the maximum number of blooms. Granular slow release fertilizers also work well in place of liquid feed. As soon as the buds are well formed discontinue feeding until after your clematis has finished flowering. By doing this, you will get the longest bloom period as possible. All feeding should stop in mid-August. The plants need time to slow down and settle in for winter. If feeding continues into the fall the soft growth promoted by this feed will be damaged by winter frosts.



Varieties

Cherokee - Pruning group C Zone 4
Rare combination of extremely free-flowering striped flowers with a compact habit. The showy 3" flowers have darker central bars and are ruffled along their edges. Height 3-4'

Chevalier - Pruning group B. Zone 4
As beautiful as its name with starry, rich purple flowers over a long bloom season. Can flower all summer! Height 4-6'

Diamantina - Pruning group C. Zone 4
An exceptional, free-flowering clematis with 4-6" pom-pom like blue double flowers, each lasting up to 4 weeks. Repeat flowering throughout the summer. Height 6-8'

Empress - Pruning group B. Zone 4
Pink outer sepals create a frilly pom-pom like bloom that sits on top of re-curved pink petals with dark pink center bars. A compact, free-flowering plant that displays well in containers. Height 6'

Ernest Markham - Pruning group C. Zone 3
One of the strongest growers. Bright magenta-red 5-6" flowers from July to September. Height 8-12'.

Jackmanii - Pruning group C. Zone 2
The best known, easiest to grow clematis. Deep purple 4-6" flowers bloom from mid-June through August. Height 12-20'

Kingfisher - Pruning group B Zone 3
Exceptionally free-flowering with huge 6-7" lilac-blue blooms appearing late spring through early summer. Re-blooming in late summer with slightly smaller flowers for an extended season of color. Creamy yellow anthers make a lovely contrast with the blue flowers. Height 8-10'

Nelly Moser - Pruning group B2 or C. Zone 3
7-9" pastel mauve-pink with carmine flowers bloom from May to September. Height 8-12'

Rebecca - Pruning group B. Zone 4.
The large red flowers of Rebecca are a stunning shade of red and bloom from early to late summer. Covers an arbor or trellis beautifully. Give it just a light prune in early spring. Height 6-18'



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