

CLEMATIS CULTURE AND CARE

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Clematis is a genus of over 200 species of twining leaf-climbers and woody-based perennials. More than 400 mainly large-flowered cultivars are in cultivation. Clematis are grown for their abundant flowers, often followed by decorative, filamentous, silvery gray seed heads. They are valued for their long flowering period, and for the variety of shape and color of their flowers.

Where should I plant my clematis?

The majority of clematis benefit from 'Hot Tops, Cool Bottoms', which means that they like sun to partial shade with their roots and the base of the plant in shade. It is essential for the roots to remain cool and moist, so protect them with a heavy mulch, the shade of low growing plants, or even a large flat rock. Some varieties prefer partial to full shade, these are noted on the attached variety table. If not noted, then the clematis will be fine in sun to part shade. Plant your clematis next to a plant or structure that it can grow up.

How do I plant my clematis?

Clematis like fertile, humus-rich, well-drained soil. When planting, place the root ball about 3 inches below the soil surface to reduce the risk of clematis wilt and to encourage production of strong shoots from below the soil level. Remember that most clematis need staked, so add one now if required. Provide the plant with a ground cover plant or a mulch such as shredded leaves, pine needles, straw, bark or even stones to help conserve moisture and to keep the roots cool. Clematis resent root disturbance, so extreme care must be exercised when working around the plant to prevent any root damage. Water well, keeping the soil always moist during the first year after planting. Fertilizer such as 5-10-10 should be applied twice during the growing season.

What is clematis wilt?

Clematis wilt is caused by soil splashing onto the stem, and is easily prevented with a mulch of bark, gravel, crazy paving, or anything that prevents soil splashing around the stems. Deep planting allows the susceptible forms to develop a crown of growth buds below ground level, and since the wilt disease affects the stem at ground level or just above, healthy new shoots from below ground can restore the plant very quickly if attacked by the wilt disease. When watering in summer it is best not to wet the foliage, but trickle the water around the base of the plant and give a good deep soak twice a week.

How do I prune my clematis?

One of the most important aspects of Clematis culture is the pruning method. Since the modern garden hybrids and selections in cultivation come from a range of different species, their growth and flowering habits must be considered at pruning time. Give a good feed of compost and bonemeal at pruning time, as well as fresh mulch to prevent soil splash. Basically they can be grouped into three categories to simplify treatment as follows:

- A:** Blooms on previous year's growth in the spring. Remove dead wood and lightly prune to shape after flowering. This covers all *C. montana*, *alpina* and *macropetala*.
- B:** Bears flowers on old wood in the spring and on new wood in the summer. Moderate pruning after spring bloom as needed. Light pruning after summer/fall bloom.
- C:** Bears flowers on new growth each year. These are summer blooming varieties. Prune these forms hard in winter to encourage new growth for better flowering next season.