



Hybrid Clematis

Uses in the Garden

Clematis can be grown as climbers, or as ground covers provided they have some form of netting or wires on which to sprawl or climb. Planting beside a climbing rose is both complementary to the rose, and ideal for the clematis. Several clematis forms are completely herbaceous, and are small shrubby plants.

Growth Requirements

Being members of the Ranunculaceae family, clematis demand copious supplies of water in summer, and a moist but not waterlogged soil. They should be planted into a well drained, rich friable loam if possible. Plant with roots in the shade, in a position where the plants can grow up into the sunshine. Large flowered varieties should be planted deeply. The lower leaves should be removed and the lower two or three nodes should be buried, in order to produce a multi stemmed plant. If wilt strikes, then the plant usually recovers and shoots from these buried nodes anytime up to several years later. Where soils are subject to waterlogging, the plants may be planted in a large bottomless tub to keep the crowns above the moisture. The plants should be mulched deeply to encourage the development of roots from the nodal stems.



During the growing season the plant should be well soaked with water twice a week and fed with a good liquid plant food once a week except when flowering. After the spring flowering flush, feed with double, then triple strength Phostrogen once a week, after watering thoroughly. A 25-30cm length of black flexible drainage pipe, placed close to the planting hole at planting time will allow

watering directly to the root zone. The pipe is filled, and water allowed to seep into the ground giving the deep watering required of the plant and eliminating any waste of water.

Disease

In the early 1900's many clematis plants succumbed to a mysterious wilt disease and their popularity declined rapidly. However, with the advent of fungicides such as Benlate and Captan this risk was lessened. The usual method of propagation then was by grafting onto stocks of *C. vitalba*, and this was blamed for causing the wilt disease, though this is scientifically unproven. Most plants suffering from wilt do so either after drying out slightly, or after the thin, wiry stem is slightly damaged by kinking, or damaged by snails or earwigs.

If wilt strikes, water well, after carefully cutting away wilted material back to where the wilt starts, or if at ground level, then removing the stem right to this level. Water plant well, mulch and protect from snails or other damage. In almost all cases the plant will recover and reward with multiple stems, and a more vigorous plant. Often, only one stem will suffer with the rest of the plant suffering no ill effect. We have to live with this problem, but the magnificent flowers make the problem fade into insignificance.

Powdery mildew may appear in early summer, and again in autumn. Some varieties are more susceptible than others. This can be easily controlled using fortnightly sprays of Lime

Sulphur, Triflorine ®, Bayleton ® or Benlate®. Both upper and lower leaf surfaces must be sprayed.

Pruning

Pruning is done according to the clematis group. Early flowering hybrids are pruned lightly in winter, as flowers are produced on the older wood, then pruned more heavily after flowering. They will then return a second flowering season in late summer. Mid and later flowering varieties are then pruned hard in winter to within 25 to 30cm of the ground. Flowers are then produced on the new growth. Flowering occurs normally about 8 weeks after cutting back. Flowers can usually be timed accurately by this method.

With care and maintenance, your hybrid clematis should give decades of enjoyment. An excellent plant choice!