

# CLEMATIS



## HUMBER NURSERIES 'GREEN THUMB GUIDE'



The genus *Clematis* encompasses some of the most beautiful flowering plants. Their beauty, elegance and sheer volume of outstanding colourful flowers offer gardeners immensely satisfying rewards. Some species grow to 15 m high while others mature at 3 – 4 m. Others are fragrant, although this scent has unfortunately not been bred into the modern large-flowered cultivars. These newer varieties provide a large range of flower shape, colour and bloom times.

Generally, small-flowered species and their hybrid cultivars are relatively easy to establish and can flower reliably for many years. Large-flowered cultivars, on the other hand, may not be as easy to establish and some may succumb to **clematis wilt**. Most plants recover from this problem, which is the biggest issue that clematis growers face.

### DISEASES

Clematis wilt is caused by a fungus which normally attacks at (or just above) the soil level, usually through a crack in the stem or at the point of some previous damage or weakness. Once wilt is discovered, the affected stems must be removed and disposed of. A fungicide can be used to drench the base of any remaining stems and the surrounding soil area to a diameter of at least 60 cm. If the clematis has been planted at least 6 cm below the soil level, in most cases the plant will recover and produce new growth from the roots. Drench the planting site with a fungicide if clematis wilt persistently re-appears.

Powdery mildew may also affect clematis and can be prevented with a fungicide (use the same spray as recommended for roses). Preventative action is recommended since there is no cure once the mildew has taken hold.

### PESTS

Earwigs can be troublesome. They emerge at night to chew holes in the leaves or to attack young growth and bore holes into flower buds, often destroying the flower before it opens. Control earwigs with diatomaceous earth or traps.

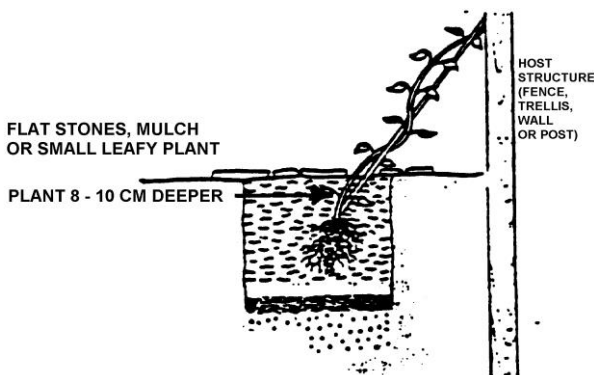
Slug and snails tend to graze on new growth and leaf buds. Methods of control include slug bait and surrounding the plants with abrasive materials such as crushed eggshells or diatomaceous earth. Alternatively, try the old remedy of placing a shallow container with beer near the plants.

### PLANTING

Clematis roots prefer shade from direct sun and are most likely to thrive in cool, moist, well-drained soil. Plant in rich loam (such as Humber 3-in-1 Planting Mix) enriched with well-rotted compost, peat moss and two handfuls of bone meal.

Before planting, condition the clematis by submerging it in its container in a bucket of water for at least 20 minutes so that the roots have had time to take up water. This is necessary because, once planted, the roots will take time to re-establish and be able to take up moisture.

Plant the root ball at an extra depth of 8 – 10 cm below the surrounding soil level. The clematis stems will need a firm support to the host structure (e.g. fence or trellis). Position the root ball so that the cane slopes towards the structure.



Clematis do not self-cling but climb by curling their leaf stems around a host structure. A chain-link fence or trellis is ideal. On a wall, strings or wires should be spaced every 25 cm in a grid and held away from the wall by 3 cm or more.

## WATERING

After planting, the most important job is watering. Immediately after the clematis has been planted, it should receive 4 – 5 litres of water. Repeat within 2 days if weather conditions are hot and dry. If planted in early summer, almost daily watering will be required until the clematis has established a new root system that has started to take up moisture. This will be signified by substantial new growth.

## FEEDING

Clematis will benefit from annual mulching and feeding during the growing period. A well-fed clematis will produce better growth, more flowers and a much healthier plant. Newly planted clematis should be fed with liquid transplant or a granular fertilizer (such as Nutrite Perennial Food) weekly for the first season. Subsequently, a liquid fertilizer such as that used for roses or flowering plants (e.g. 15-30-15) is sufficient. The amount of food and frequency of application will vary according to the type used and careful attention should always be paid to the manufacturer's recommendations.

In general, start feeding once new growth appears in early spring and continue until just before flowering. Resume after flowering to encourage further growth. If feeding commences during flowering, the blooming period may end prematurely.

## PRUNING

The pruning of clematis is quite simple if the flowering habit is understood. Clematis basically flower on new (this year's growth) or old (prior year's growth) wood. As long as the plant's name is known, pruning instructions can be obtained from reference books. If a clematis cannot be identified, remember the saying: 'If it flowers before the end of June, don't prune', as it must be an old-wood flowering variety.

All newly planted clematis require hard pruning (to 30 – 45 cm) during the first spring after planting regardless of pruning group so that young growth will be produced from the base of the planting.

**Group One** consists of all the spring flowering varieties. These produce flowers on old wood and therefore no pruning should be carried out until after flowering. Then remove all dead and weak stems and any new growth which has spread beyond the allotted space.

**Group Two** consists of all the old-wood flowering varieties including the early large-flowered cultivars, the double and semi-double large flowered cultivars and the mid-season large-flowered cultivars. Some will produce a later crop of flowers on new growth. All dead and weak stems should be removed in early spring and remaining stems cut down to the highest pair of strong buds. All old leaves, dead or green, should be removed at this time.

**Group Three** consists of the late large-flowering cultivars and all late-flowering varieties that flower on the current season's growth. Generally, these varieties bloom profusely. This group requires major pruning, with all stems being removed in early spring down to 30 – 75 cm above soil level where strong new leaf buds appear.

## OTHER NOTES

Some clematis growers prefer to remove spent flower heads to encourage further crops of flowers. If the old blooms are removed with a length of stem with 2 or 3 nodes, new growth will appear and a further crop of flowers will be produced. When this is done, it is important to keep the clematis well watered and fed. The drawback to this is that attractive seed heads will be lost, however a compromise can be achieved by removing only 50 percent of the spent flowers.

Many people like to grow clematis together with climbing roses to achieve interesting colour combinations and flowering periods. Select varieties which do not require hard pruning.

Similarly, different varieties of clematis can be grown together. For this purpose, select clematis varieties belonging to groups two and three.

**Propagation** of clematis is best carried out by either layering or cuttings. Propagation by division is not recommended.

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