

Sky Vine Decorates a Trellis



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Last fall the most beautiful vine imaginable grew and flourished on my front arbor. From August until freezing weather, clusters of three-inch-long, bell-like flowers hung in glorious profusion. Everyone who saw it wanted one, and no wonder. The vine was quite a sight, clad attractively with blue trumpet flowers, shown to greatest advantage against broad, dark green, heart-shaped leaves.

In areas with no frost or freezing weather, sky vine is evergreen, but frost kills the green above-ground portions back to the ground. In our area it sprouts back in spring, spends most of the summer growing to blooming size, and puts on a spectacular show in early fall until the first frost. Sky vine is root hardy to below 20 degrees F, but the stems will freeze back when temperatures reach around 25 degrees.

Sky vine appreciates some protection from direct afternoon sun, so site accordingly. Provide with a sturdy trellis or other support. One plant is probably sufficient, but if you plant multiple plants, space plants 36 to 60 inches apart. Provide for good drainage, but make sure to keep the soil evenly moist for best performance. Highly organic soils are a good defense against root-knot nematodes that may become problematic.

Upkeep is minimal. Some pruning may be required to keep the vigorous vine in bounds. Dead vines should be cut back after the first freeze. Mulch with pine needles or other organic material to protect the roots during the winter.

Sky vine may be used in several ways. The stunning blue flowers are attractive in floral designs. The vine may be used to climb to the top of a high support or to drape over the edge of a tall container or raised wall or planting bed.

Sky vine is an appropriate name for this vigorous vine, for it will climb to the top of its supporting structure. Its fast-growing habit makes it a natural to cover an arbor, trellis, or fence. Amazingly, after my vine reached the

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top of its trellis, it continued to reach for the sky until a tendril grasped the branch of a pine tree some three feet above it. This was of no major concern, though, as the vine is killed back by freezing weather each winter.

Caution should be exercised with this in areas of the world where freezes don't occur. The vine is reported as an exotic invasive in Queensland , Australia . In areas where freezing weather does not control its growth, it is a beautiful, but rampant weed.

Propagation is easy. Cuttings taken in warm weather root readily. Layering is easily accomplished, for stems root when they come in contact with the soil. Root cuttings may be made from the tuberous roots.

Flowers of *Thunbergia grandiflora* may be sky blue to light violet. A white-flowered type is available, as well.

A close cousin is the black-eyed Susan vine (*Thunbergia alata*). It is an annual vine that is easily grown from seed. In my yard it has become almost weedy, and I find that I must remove unwanted vines frequently. However, those that are allowed to grow and bloom in appropriate places in the landscape make it well worth the trouble.

At a Glance

Thunbergia grandiflora

Say: thun-BER-jee-uh gran-dih-FLOR-uh

Family: *Acanthaceae* (Acanthus

Family)

Other names: Bengal Clock Vine, Clock Vine, Indian Sky Vine, Blue Skyflower

Origin: India

Moisture: Moderate

Zones: 8-11

Light: Part Sun

Size: To top of supporting structure

Soil: Moist, Well-drained

Salt tolerance: Slight

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