

Vines in the Garden: *Wondrous and Utilitarian*



Photo by: Don Armstrong. Clematis flowers in a Tallahassee Garden .

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Why vines? What's more beautiful than a black-eyed Susan vine covering an arbor with miniature blooms? What's a better solution to a landscape problem than covering a chain link fence with fragrant white-flowered evergreen clematis?

Vines are versatile plants in the landscape. Because they don't need much ground, they are great for small spaces. Growing upward, they add a vertical element, providing interest and movement. They can soften or conceal fences or walls, or supply shade for a porch or outdoor bench. But the main reason they are planted is for their sheer beauty.

Dressy vines, set up in the right way, can serve as elegant specimen plants around which secondary plants can be planned. My own favorite use of vines is to attract butterflies and hummingbirds. Vines are also great for

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window boxes and other containers, where they can drape down to add a different element of texture.

On the ground, vines cover difficult places to grow and provide erosion control. Although vines do not have feet, they do have unique ways of climbing. Knowing how climbing habits vary can help to determine the best support for their growth.

Some vines, such as climbing roses and hybrid clematis, have no specialized climbing method other than their sprawling stems, which can be interlaced or tied to supports to achieve the desired effect. Passion flower and sweet pea climb by tendrils, reaching out and curling around whatever happens to be in the way, including other plants.

Twining vines, such as morning glory, wisteria and confederate jasmine, are some of the easiest to grow. They simply wrap their stems around supports such as posts, chain links, lattice or bird netting. The accompanying box highlights some vines any gardener would do well to nurture. But not all vines are to be encouraged. Japanese wisteria, for example, can be invasive, taking over a landscape if not controlled. Perhaps the most troublesome for anyone in the garden is *Toxicodendron radicans*, or poison ivy. It is one vine to be avoided at all costs!

(BOX)

A few favorites

Clematis (Large-flowered hybrids). These lightly weighted vines sport stunning hand-sized blooms with colors in the blue/purple/pink and white/cream range. They like to be planted with their roots in the shade and their heads in the sun as a liriopse or other small plant nearby can shade the roots. They will cheerfully climb over a shrub such as Beautyberry and lend it showy flowers in the off season.

Dutchman's Pipe Vine (*Aristolochia*). A vine for butterfly lovers as it is the host plant upon which the pipe vine swallowtail lays its eggs. Easy and fast to grow in sun to part shade. Fascinating burgundy and cream flowers must be seen to be believed.

Chocolate Vine (*Akebia quinata*). How can any chocolate lover resist its five-leaflet clusters in dark green with cluster of florets in chocolate to dark burgundy? In sun or shade the twining vine is a vigorous grower and easily covers wrought iron or chain link fences. Spring blooms; deciduous.

Amethyst Falls Wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*). This non-invasive native is a striking plant with its deep blue/purple flower heads which bloom in its first year. Blooms appear in mid-April thus avoiding frost damage, and it will repeat bloom in June and August. A moderate grower, its stems may reach 12 to 16 feet.