

# Pruning Clematis

## Find out your pruning code

Before starting to prune your Clematis you should find out which pruning group it belongs to.

If you do not have a name for your Clematis, then try the following.

People living in the Northern Hemisphere should determine whether the plant flowers before or after July. If it flowers before July treat as group 1 or 2, otherwise as group 3.

If you live in the Southern Hemisphere and your Clematis flowers before January treat it as group 1 or 2 otherwise as group 3.

## Pruning newly planted Clematis

Irrespective of the pruning code, it is absolutely essential to hard-prune all Clematis the first spring after planting. It might cost you some flowers but it will help form a better plant with a stronger root system and will encourage the growth of new stems at the base and below soil level. The more stems you have on your Clematis the more flowers you will have.

For this first year's hard-pruning cut all growth back to just above a good set of viable buds in the leaf joints approximately 10-12" from the ground.

In subsequent years, pruning depends on the respective pruning code of your clematis.

## Pruning established Clematis

### Pruning Code 1 (No pruning)

Clematis of this group bloom in early spring on the previous year's wood. So, if you prune them too late, you will lose next year's flowers.

However, if you want to do some pruning, do this as soon as possible after bloom but no later than the end of July. In this way there is enough time for new growth to produce flower buds for the next season

Plants in this group only need some 'tidy up' consisting of pruning off dead or unwanted growth and then tying the remainder to its support. However they can also benefit from occasional thinning or even cutting back hard to reinvigorate them (except Clematis montana, which dislikes hard pruning). And then take care not to cut into woody trunks. However if you are in doubt, better do nothing and they will be just fine. Some group1 members are: C.alpina, C.cirrhosa, C.armandii, C.macropetala, C.montana

### Pruning Code 2 (Light)

This group is composed entirely of the large-flowered hybrids which bloom in Mid-June on short stems from the previous season's growth, and often again in late summer on new growth (these blooms are smaller). Also included here are those Clematis with double flowers, whose second flush later in the summer produces only single blooms. Although group 2 Clematis can also be left unpruned, the flowers are larger and foliage is healthier on well-pruned plants. Start at the top of the plant and reduce all stems down to a good set of viable buds in the leaf joints, then cut out any dead or weak growth and tidy the remainder of the plant to a good shape. Also at this stage consider hard pruning just two or three stems to encourage young growth from soil level. This will help to keep the plant flowering low down and generally look much better. A complete hard pruning every few years will help to rejuvenate an old, tired plant. But, as it is not advisable in cold climates as ours to prune much in late winter, we would recommend to partially prune the Clematis between thigh and waist height during late autumn or early winter. Tie in the remaining stems to avoid wind damage over the winter period. This partial pruning will encourage viable buds to form in the leaf joints low down on the stems which will then make the final hard pruning in early spring more successful.

### Pruning Code 3 (Hard)

Plants in this group set buds on the last 2-3 feet of the current season's new growth. So when you are pruning these clematis you don't have to be worried about maintaining any of the old wood. In early spring cut each stem to a height of about 10-12 inch. Plants with this pruning code are by and large the late-flowering Clematis as for example the viticella-group, C. tangutica, C. jackmanii, C. terniflora, C. maximowicziana.



Group 1  
Spring Flowering



Group2  
Repeat bloomers



Group 3  
Summer or fall bloomers

# Growing Clematis

## When to plant?

The best time to plant Clematis is Spring, or early Fall. But they can be planted throughout the season too.

## Where to plant?

Most Clematis do best in a location with 5-6 hours of sunlight, which is regarded as full sun, but if they can get a little afternoon shade they will only thank you with stronger colors. If they are standing in full blazing sun all day long, especially in the Southern States, there will be a little fading of the flower color. Some Clematis can even take some more shade f.ex, 'Carnaby', 'Alabast', 'Henrii', 'Nelly Moser', 'Bee's Jubilee', 'Guernsey Cream, Hagley', 'Jackmanii', 'Nelly Moser', viticella and montana varieties etc.

## How to plant?

Look carefully at the Clematis you are planting so you can see where the pairs of buds emerge from the stem. Plant the vine so that two pair of buds (often 3-4 inches up the stem) are below ground level. When you take the Clematis out of a pot plant it one inch deeper than it was. The soil in the planting area should be prepared to a depth of 24 inches in an area approximately 3 feet wide. It is best to incorporate one third by volume compost or rotted manure to help improve aeration and drainage. If your soil is extremely acidic you can apply some lime. Most Clematis grow well with a pH of 6.0 to 7.5. However humus and adequate moisture are much more important than lime.

## Clematis like cool roots!

You could for example plant some annuals around the base of the Clematis or plant a low growing shrub to shade the roots. Also mulching is very good. Apply 2-3 inches of organic (not rock) mulch to help keep the roots cool, minimize weeds and keep the moisture more even. This will give you healthier and happier plants.

## Feeding:

It is important to keep established Clematis well fertilized or else you will end up with smaller and fewer blooms. In the second growing season you can start applying a fertilizer high in phosphorus such as Plant Tone 5-3-3 in May and again in mid-June.

## Support

Some support should be provided for Clematis vines unless they are left to scramble over walls, small trees or shrubs, or to sprawl over ground-cover beds or grass. If you install a trellis or any other support against a wall, leave 3-4 inches distance from the wall for ventilation and space for the vine to twine. Poles can be used for supporting smaller, less vigorous vines; these are isolated vertical features often surrounded by lower growing herbaceous plants. Arbors and pergolas are suitable for the larger, more vigorous types of Clematis.

## Problems

The most devastating problem affecting Clematis is a fungal stem rot and leaf spot commonly called "wilt". It occurs predominantly on large-flowered hybrids. The symptoms are a sudden stem collapse typically as the flower buds are about to open, and within a few days the stem and leaves turn black. The usual treatment is to remove the diseased stem below the wilted section, even below soil line if need be. Plants usually recover. The soil surrounding the roots can then be drenched with fungicide twice, 1-2 weeks apart, if needed. Another fungal disease is powdery mildew which can occur in poorly ventilated locations. If this is the case you may consider moving the plant. A fungicide can be applied to prevent powdery mildew as well. Early treatment gives the best results.

There can also be devastating slug and snail damage and the plant may appear to wilt. Take appropriate action to get rid of these pests. (Sluggo or Ortho's Bug-Geta)

# Clematis

## Growing & Pruning



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