

Talk on Clematis with a pruning demonstration

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By Marcus Dancer

Clematis is a World Wide plant with societies celebrating it all over the world. It is considered to be one of the most popular and versatile garden plants, able to be grown on walls, pergolas, frames, in containers or even allowed to scramble through trees and shrubs. Some of the plants can withstand temperatures of -34 degrees!

There are Clematis which will flower in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter and can range in height from 15cm – 9m (6” – 28 ft). They will tolerate either sun or partial shade and are mostly hardy and moderately easy to grow. However, what a Clematis dislikes above all, is to be waterlogged, preferring a water-retentive soil which is well drained.

Some gardeners advocate that it is helpful to shade the roots by placing old crocks/stones or tiles at the base of the plant. However, this is probably not to be advised as these can provide safe haven for slugs and snails., who are quite partial to tender, young, green shoots!

Maintenance of your clematis plants will benefit from an application of a potassium-rich fertiliser from Spring onwards, such as Vitax-Q4, Osmacote, or Fish, Blood and Bone and then mulch with organic matter such as well-rotted manure or garden compost. If you are planting in containers, feeding on a regular basis is essential.

Clematis fall into 3 categories when it comes to pruning. If left unpruned, clematis can become a tangled mass of stems with a bare base and flowers above eye level.

Clematis in Group 1 flower early in the year and should be pruned after flowering in mid to late Spring.

Clematis in Group 2 are the large-flowered hybrids that flower in May to June and should be pruned in late Winter or early Spring after the first flush of flowers in Summer.

Clematis in Group 3 flower in late summer on growth made in that season and should be pruned in late winter or early Spring when buds show signs of growth. This method is suitable for herbaceous clematis.

The Viticella group of clematis originates from Southern Europe and includes deciduous, climbing shrubs regarded as durable, easy-care, vigorous and free-flowering. They are ideal for planting on Chalk, Clay, Loam and Sand.

The Clematis Texensis Group is a series of ‘trumpet’ shaped, late flowering that produce hundreds of flowers that nod, look up and straight at you.

Clematis Montana blooms profusely from late Spring to early Summer.

One particular Clematis that Marcus mentioned is ‘Cassandra’ which grows to 1 metre, is dark navy blue and has a delicious scent. Another fabulously scented Clematis is ‘Chris’ which grows up to 1 metre and is of the herbaceous variety bearing shorter stems but more flowers than usually found in plants of this group. This clematis is also wonderful for attracting bees and other wildlife. Clematis Aromatica is a bush forming, highly scented non-climbing shrub growing 1 to 2 metres. It is non-clinging variety and can be grown in a pot or border.

'Fragrant Oberon' grows from 30cms to 45 cms, is sweetly scented and ideal for a container. It needs a sunny aspect but sheltered and has the benefit of being evergreen. It is interesting in that it flowers from the bottom of the stem

Another Spring Clematis, 'Early Sensation' has white flowers, evergreen leaves and can grow to 2.5metres. . It will flower April, May and June. Likes a sunny to semi-shaded position.. Do not plant any deeper than the plants original planting.

It is also very important to water regularly during periods of dry weather, particularly so during the first few seasons after planting.

The main points that the audience took away with them was that all pruning happens during January, February, March and the importance of feeding, mulching and watering in dry spells. When it comes to choice, well, quite literally, the World is your oyster.

The evening rounded off with a vote of thanks given by Stewart Bussell.



From left to right: Stewart Bussell, Marcus Dancer, Alistair Dudley-Ward