

the versatile . Clematis

New cultivars make it easier than ever to enjoy this favorite vine

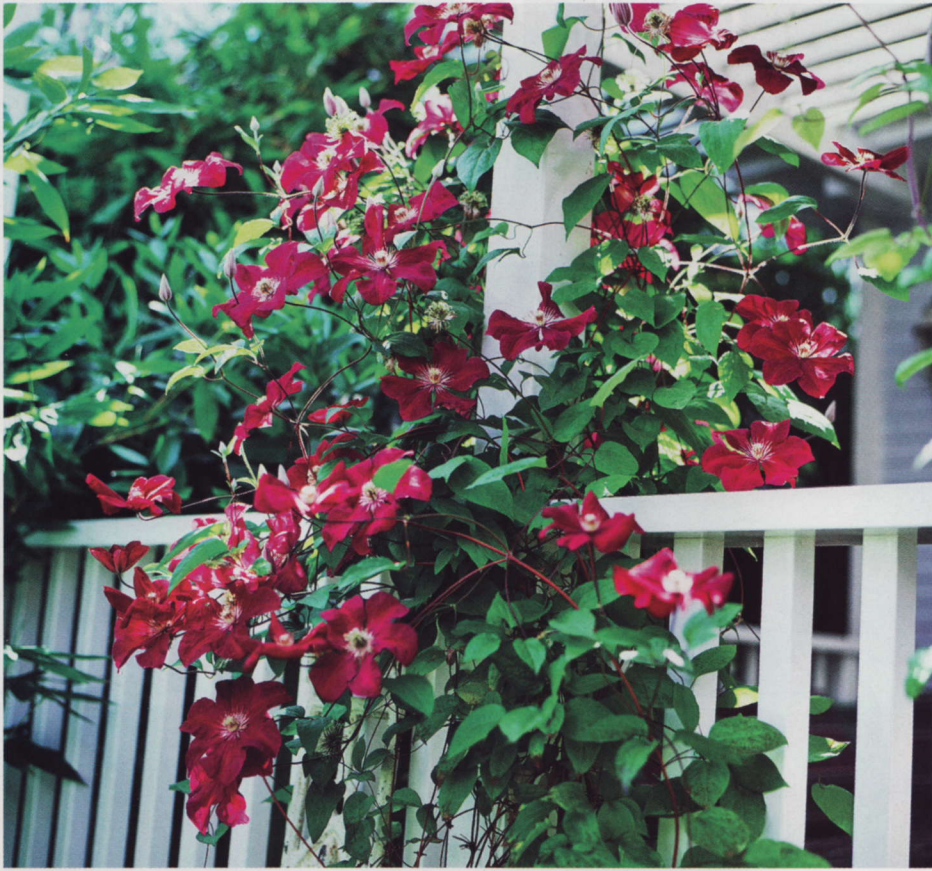
{ by Margaret Littman }



UNFORGETTABLE FLOWERS. With an ever-growing variety of cultivars, there's a clematis, like the jackmanii, that will add color and beauty to just about any space.

If you have ever admired the bright blooms of twining clematis, you should probably thank Raymond J. Evison. As the world's leading producer of young plants, Evison has turned what was once a temperamental beauty into a garden mainstay. >>

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CLIMBING CLEMATIS. Fences, trellises, and mailboxes all present opportunities to show off the impressive blooms of the flowering 'Niobe'.

Choosing Cultivars

- **Consider color.** If you plant in strong sun, opt for white, red, or deep purple flowers that will hold their color. Save the pale pinks and creams for north-facing locations, where they can brighten up the shade.
- **Contain your enthusiasm.** Some new clematis types, like 'Angelique', only grow to 3 to 4 feet, perfect for large pots. Containers can be moved to a garage to winter over.
- **Prepare to prune.** If you grow clematis plants up through a rose bush that needs pruning, be sure to choose a summer-flowering clematis that tolerates hard pruning.

SOME VARIETIES TO CONSIDER:

'**Angelique**': Pale lilac flower blooms early summer to late autumn. Grows to 4 feet tall.

'**Cezanne**': Sky blue flowers with overlapping petals. Blooms early summer to late autumn, and grows to 4 feet tall.

'**Ice Blue**': Pale blue with large flowers (6 to 8 inches); exceptionally free-flowering. Part of the Gardini collection. Grows to 8 feet tall.

'**Josephine**': Unusual double-flowering variety with bright colors; can grow to 8 feet.

'**Picardy**': Unusual red flowers; grows to 3 feet tall.

"His name is synonymous with clematis," says Tim Hamilton, marketing director for Homestead Gardens, which works with Evison's Guernsey Clematis Nursery Ltd. to make choice plants available to its customers.

Located on Guernsey, one of the English Channel Islands, Evison's greenhouses occupy more than eight acres. Every year, his team produces over 4 million clematis plants, but only the strongest and healthiest plants eventually make their way to garden centers in the United States and elsewhere, about eight years after they are first planted.

Evison, who has been devoted to the plant since he was a teenager, has introduced more than 100 species and cultivars — and counting. He is also the author of several books, including *Clematis for Small Spaces* (Timber Press, 2007).

The clematis is not just one plant, but 300 species, varying from those with big, three-inch blooms to those dotted with tiny, star-like blossoms. There are clematis varieties both for containers and for the garden, and most are climbing varieties. Some bloom in the spring, some in the hottest days of summer, and

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HOW DO YOU SAY?

One clematis FAQ is basic: How to pronounce the plant's name, which comes from the Greek word for "climbing vine." Grower Raymond Evison, with his British accent, prefers "CLEM-a-tis," with the accent on the first syllable. Most North Americans say "clem-A-tis," with the emphasis on the "a" as in "mat." Either pronunciation is acceptable and Evison quips, "I don't mind what people call them as long as they buy them and enjoy them."

others in the fall. And many new varieties flower continuously from May to September, giving gardeners more bang for their buck.

Today's clematis offers a lot of color without requiring a lot of space and works well — in fact, thrives — with a wide cross-section of other plants.

“In the past,” Evison says, “they were challenging, and gardeners like a challenge.” Newer, hardier varieties have only solidified the appeal. “Unless you stomp on top of them every day for a week, they should grow well for you,” he adds. ♦

Margaret Littman appreciates a challenge, both as a writer and a gardener.

For more information, go to www.homesteadgardens.com.

CLEMATIS TIPS FROM GROWER RAYMOND EVISON

- **Combine with other plants.** Add some plants at the base of the clematis, providing shade, moisture, and nutrients. Or instead of a trellis, let your clematis climb through a rose bush or up a magnolia.
- **Screen sun.** Three to four hours of sun daily is plenty, and the base of the plant needs less than that.
- **Keep dry.** Provide free-draining soil and don't over water.
- **Don't move.** With a thin root system, clematis plants do not like to be transplanted.
- **Dig deep.** Follow planting instructions.
- **Make a ponytail.** To make pruning free-flowering clematis — such as 'Cezanne' and 'Picardy' — easy, grab the plant in one hand about 12 inches above the ground, like a ponytail, and snip.
- **Be patient.** An adage that applies to clematis: “In the first year it sleeps. In the second year it creeps. In the third year it leaps.” Give your new plant time to get established.

CHOICES, CHOICES. Clematis varieties, like the 'Nelly Moser' (right) and 'Elsa Spath' (below), offer many options, thanks in large part to the outstanding breeding efforts of master clematis grower Raymond Evison on the Isle of Guernsey.

