



July 21, 2020

Contributed by Samantha McCall

## All About Clematis

“The common hill-flowers, but they blossom again. The laburnum will be as yellow next June as it is now. In a month there will be purple stars on the clematis, and year after year the green night of its leaves will hold its purple stars. But we never get our youth back.” Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Some say “kluh-mat-us” and some say “klem-ah-tiss.” Either way you pronounce it, I’m an enormous fan of this large genus hailing from the Ranunculaceae family. So much in fact, that on a recent count I realized I have 8 cultivars growing in my garden, with repeats found throughout!



1. Betty Corning
2. 'Avant-Garde'
3. Jackmanii
4. Roguuchi
5. Etoile Violette

All photos taken by Samantha

With Asian origins, when these floriferous woody vines are happy, they can be quite profusive and vigorous. They reliably follow the seasons, starting with the gentle must-have *Clematis armandii* (an evergreen vine with sweet smelling orange-like blossoms) in early spring to the darn near invasive *Clematis paniculata* (Sweet Autumn Clematis) in late summer/early fall with a nearly non-stop flowery show of cousins in between.

Many are climbers and are good candidates for trellises, fences and walls but there are a handful of non-vining shrubby ones like *C. recta* and *C. integrifolia*. For brave gardeners, try growing some of the better-behaved vining ones through rose bushes or other shrubs to increase interest when the shrub itself is not blooming. \*\*Warning: do not try this with *C. paniculata* unless you are in need of a complete disguise or you enjoy the challenge of freeing vines from innocent neighboring plants and trees.

I confess I am partial to the bell-shaped nodding ones, most especially *C. rooguchi* which is a striking workhorse in my garden throughout the dog days of summer. *C. Betty Corning*, whose small blue flowers look like fairy hats, makes my heart flutter every time I walk by thanks to its delicate twists and turns up the obelisk.

In addition to appreciating them in the garden, as a floral designer, I love using them in arrangements. Their long lasting and twisting, organic vines create movement and add lightness to large focal flowers while small wispy blooms dance above like butterflies – or colorful sprinkles atop a cake. Not to forget the swirling seed heads and seed pods in the fall.

Clematis do best with their feet in the shade and their flowers and foliage in the sun. If you are new to clematis, be sure to take heed of the old gardener's adage:

The first year they sleep.  
The second year they creep.  
The third year they leap.

**So take heart and have patience.**