KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Clematis – What’s not to love?”

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You see them in garden centers with large, delicate-looking blooms and think: Ha! They won’t grow here. But Do **not** be fooled! Surprisingly, Clematis are native to all continents – except Antarctica. Over 100 varieties are even hardy to zone 4 or less, and can handle our tough Central Oregon winters.

But first, how to pronounce it: Some say Clem-ah-tis, some say Cla-mat-is. Both are correct, so don’t get hung up on it.

Clematis are diverse in form and shape, ranging from shrubs to vines, both evergreen and deciduous. Garden centers typically carry only the showy hybrid vines. To see more varieties, you can visit the Rogerson Clematis Collection in West Linn Oregon, (south of Portland). They have over 880 taxa. In addition to lovely display gardens, they grow numerous varieties for sale to the public.

The blooms of Clematis vary in size, shape and color. Some sport large purple, pink or white blossoms, while new hybrids even have red flowers. Other blooms are small and fragrant, with yellow, creamy and even blue ‘bell’ shaped flowers. Some varieties bloom once in the spring, summer or fall. While others bloom twice (both spring and fall).

Clematis require ample sunlight (6 hours per day), cool and moist roots (not wet), and climbing support. They can be planted to grow on a trellis or wall, but they also make great companion plants for trees or shrubs. You can partner a Clematis that blooms in the fall with a spring blooming shrub such as lilac, and benefit from colorful blooms twice a year.

They have some special handling requirements to start, but are easy to maintain. To prepare for planting a one-gallon plant, dig a large hole, 2 feet deep and nearly as wide. While digging, soak the plant pot in water to fully hydrate it. In the planting hole, mix some native soil with compost or potting mix in and around the plant. For hybrids, place the plant so it is buried two to three inches up the stem, and below ground level. (much like a tomato). (NOTE: Non hybrid varieties can be planted at soil level.) If needed, stake it until it reaches the supporting trellis or shrub.

Clematis like their faces in the sun, and their feet to be cool. A cover of mulch (bark, gravel or straw) will provide some insulation from both summer heat and winter cold. A medium rock placed on the south side will also provide needed shade for the roots.

They require regular water, but do **not** over water. Once established, a little compost or plant food (5-10-5) or (5-10-10), in spring, summer and fall covers its needs.

All Clematis need to be pruned sometime. In Central Oregon where major die-back occurs in winter, look carefully at the vines in late spring, and prune back to the live wood and plump buds. Others should be pruned about half their length after the spring blooms fade if they will become too long, or unmanageable.

When given a proper start, and a little maintenance, these hardy plants will reward you with blooms for years to come.

For answers to all your gardening questions and to sign up for COMGA’s Spring Seminar Series, please visit our website: www.gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar.  This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s *The Point*.

Resources:

1. Oregon State University publication: “Clematis climb into a special place in the garden”
2. ‘The Plant Lover’s Guide to Clematis’ by Linda Beutler