



First Steps with Clematis

If you haven't tried clematis before, or if you have been disappointed in the results, here are some suggestions. Following them should produce a plant with a healthy attitude!

The clematis seen for sale in tiny pots or cardboard tubes are infants and not strongly rooted. It is better to grow on these little plants in a 1-gallon pot for a few months than to plant them straight into the ground. Young clematis do not object to growing in a pot for a while, whereas if they are abandoned into a big hole without sufficient root mass, they may have trouble establishing.

If possible, choose a location for your clematis with a half-day of sun, or if in open ground, provide a sun-filtering shrubby neighbor. Most clematis (but not *all*) enjoy sun on their top growth, and moist cool soil at their roots. Striped clematis (such as 'Nelly Moser') fade quickly in full sun, and the blossoms are prettier when the plants are grown in partial shade, or at least out of the way of hot afternoon sun. Dappled shade is ideal for the striped cultivars or clematis with pale, subtle colors.

Choose a spot where the soil will not often be disturbed by replanting. Clematis may send out feeder roots near the surface. If you want to surround a clematis with annuals, choose self-seeders, and don't work the new plants too near the base of the clematis. Some gardeners prefer to use quarter 10 gravel mulch (don't use bark) mounded slightly around the base of the clematis.

Dunk the new clematis in a bucket of deep water for 10 minutes (or until bubbles stop rising from the roots). This assures you that the root ball enters the ground well-watered and without dry pockets.

When you are ready to plant the clematis remove the stake in the pot with the clematis and **prune the clematis back to 12-18 inches tall**. Try to leave one or two sets of leaves. If your clematis has flower buds, let it flower in the pot, and plant it after flowering is finished. ***Always*** prune your clematis when transplanting or planting; this reduces stress for you and the plant.

Dig a hole 18" deep for your new clematis. Put some coarse material in the bottom of the hole (compost, gravel, and some bone meal or other mild organic low-nitrogen fertilizer). If you are planting a large-flowered hybrid, place the clematis in the hole so that 2-3 inches of the shoots are buried once the soil is replaced around the plant in the hole.

Clematis need companions: provide a shrub, tree, fence or trellis for your clematis to climb on. Non-climbing (herbaceous) clematis look better sprawling into a shrub (roses and hydrangeas are ideal). Staking should be your last option.

Keep the ground moist. Once active growth starts, fertilize your new plant with a mild rose and flower food (4-6-2 or similar, all numbers below 10). Clematis with yellowing foliage will appreciate a drink of Epsom Salts (magnesium sulfate), or a fertilizer with magnesium sulfate in it (try tomato formulas).