

Growing Your Garden Vertically

Perennial Vines

Vines are a wonderful and creative way to grow your garden vertically, maximize your garden's space and increase its visual impact. Vines grow upward by attaching themselves to some form of support. Their ability to climb and cling can add privacy to your patio, transform an unsightly wall, attract birds, and add shade, fragrance and color to your garden. All this, and perennial vines come back yearly!

Uses for Vines

Screening, Privacy and Shade

You can train vines to grow up a trellis, pergola, gazebo or screened porch to provide privacy as well as shade. You can hide or soften an ugly wall, fence or eyesore by using a vine. Camouflage an old chain link fence or unsightly wall with vines that remain evergreen all winter, such as ivy and euonymus.

Fragrance and Color

Perennial vines can add fragrance and color to the garden.

- ... Wisteria's hanging grape-like clusters of purple or white flowers add not only wonderful color in late spring, but also a delightful scent.
- ... The honeysuckle family has fragrant, brightly colored, tubular flowers that attract bees and hummingbirds.
- ... While porcelainberry vine is not known for its flowers or fragrance, its variegated foliage and light blue berries make it an attractive addition to any garden.
- ... Autumn's rich colors are best seen in the vivid scarlet leaves of Virginia creeper.

Ground Cover and Erosion Control

Vines such as English or Boston ivy make a good, fast-growing ground cover that helps control erosion. On a sunny slope, euonymus varieties with variegated leaves are a good choice for use as a ground cover.

How Vines Climb

To provide the proper means of support for keeping a perennial vine upright, you first need to know how they climb.

| Clinging Vines | Twining Vines | Tendrilled Vines |
|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |
| <p>Clinging vines climb by attaching themselves to surfaces by small suction disks or rootlets called holdfasts.</p> <p>They can adhere to any surface, even smooth ones. They do especially well attaching to the slightly rough surface of wood, brick or stone.</p> | <p>Twining vines spiral upward by winding themselves around a support — such as a wire, a trellis or even a shrub or tree.</p> <p>Ingrained genetic traits tell vines to twine either clockwise or counter-clockwise. If you wind a vine around a support the wrong way, it will unwind itself and fall to the ground.</p> <p>Twining vines tend to be quite woody and get very heavy, so they require very sturdy supports.</p> | <p>Tendrilled vines like porcelain-berry (a member of the grape family) have a twisting, threadlike tendril. They climb by curling around a wire or narrow support such as bamboo.</p> <p>Because the spaces are too far apart, avoid using a wide, latticework trellis for vines with tendrils.</p> |

Supports for Vines

The secret of gardening with vines is to: (1) Choose a vine that suits the space in your garden and the sun/shade factors, and (2) select a structure that provides the proper form of support for your vine.

When choosing a support, keep in mind your garden’s overall design. Is it formal, informal or a cottage-style garden? And most importantly, be sure to install your support form **before** planting your vine!

Twiners, such as wisteria, require horizontal wire struts placed about 20 inches apart to keep the plant from slipping down in storms. Attach galvanized wires (10 to 14 gauge) to walls, trellises and fences with bolts or eye screws. If you are reluctant to screw wire attachments into stucco, brick or wooden walls, install panels of hanging chicken wire 1 to 2 feet out from the house or wall. Thread metal rods through the tops and bottoms of the wire panels. Use screw hooks in the eaves and stakes at ground level to anchor the rods.

Let's answer some common questions concerning vines and their support.

Will ivy damage the mortar on my brick wall or chimney?

It might, especially if your mortar isn't in good condition. However, using horizontal or vertical wires set out 4 inches from brick walls or a trellis will help solve this problem. One should never allow ivy to climb under drainpipes, under eaves or directly on a wall of a wood home, as this can cause wood rot and make repainting difficult.

Can a vine growing up a tree harm the tree?

Yes, it could, but only if the vine girdles a branch. This rarely happens.

Can I plant different varieties of vines on the same trellis or arbor?

You can, but their cultural and pruning requirements should be the same because their branches will intertwine.

Planting and Training Vines

Plant vines in the spring after the last chance of frost. Here's how.

Step 1 Because the soil closest to walls and fences tends to be dry and of poor quality, it is important to first properly prepare the soil. Remove weeds and rocks. Dig down 8 to 10 inches and amend the soil with compost.

Step 2 Dig the hole for the plant 6 to 12 inches out from the support system or wall. This allows for ventilation behind the plant and for the plant's growth.

Step 3 **Bare-root plants**

- a. Soak bare-root plants for one hour in a bucket of water before planting.
- b. Make a cone-shaped mound of soil in the bottom of the hole.
- c. Gently spread the roots over the top of the soil cone, keeping the plant crown at soil level.
- d. Gently backfill the soil into the hole, pat it down and water to remove any air pockets.

Container plants

- a. Make sure container plants are well-watered before planting.
- b. Dig a hole twice as wide and twice as deep as the container.
- c. In the bottom of the hole, add a small amount of a fertilizer following package directions.
- d. Gently remove the plant from the container and straighten out any encircling roots. Set the plant in the hole so that the top of the root ball is just at soil level.

Step 4 Mulch the plant to help keep the plant's base covered and cool, but keep the mulch away from the stem.

Keep the soil moist but not soggy. As the plant stems begin to grow, guide the stems to the climbing support and attach them with loose plant ties (plastic-coated wire, rubber loops or soft cloth strips) until they are able to fasten on themselves.

Pruning Vines

Maintenance

The first year. The first year's growth of a vine often will be limited until the plant's root system is established. Therefore, very little pruning other than early pinching is required. Cut off all shoots that jut out perpendicular to the direction of growth. Think of how you want the vine to look in its prime, and prune accordingly.

Subsequent years. There are two cardinal rules for pruning vines:

✓ Prune lightly during the plant's growing season.

Vines that flower in the spring. As a general rule, these vines bloom on last year's growth — prune them shortly after flowering.

Vines that flower in summer and fall. These vines bloom on the current year's growth — prune them in early March before growth begins.

Individual varieties may have special pruning needs.

✓ Wait until late winter to prune more severely.

Make the most severe cuts when the vine is dormant. Late winter is the best time to remove any dead or damaged wood or occasionally thin out some old wood.

Rejuvenation

When a vine has grown completely out of control and no longer looks healthy or attractive, consider drastic surgery to rejuvenate it. The best time to do this is early March while the vine is still dormant, with re-growth beginning soon.

Cut back most of the plant to the ground, leaving just a few young one-year-old stalks growing near the main stem. When the vine begins to send up new shoots, leave three or four of the most vigorous and clip off the rest. These new shoots should grow quite rapidly, giving you a healthy vine.

Vines for the Kansas City Area

The next two pages list perennial vines that should do well in the Kansas City area. Clematis is not included in this list even though it is a perennial vine. Detailed information on growing Clematis is available in another publication available from the Johnson County Extension office.

| Plant Name | Height | Sun | Comments |
|--|--------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Clinging Vines | | | |
| <i>Bignonia capreolata</i> Tangerine Beauty Crossvine | 20 - 50 ft | Sun | Very fast-growing evergreen to semi-evergreen foliage Ruby-tangerine flowers in spring Sporadically reblooms in summer Expect some dieback during severe winter |
| <i>Campsis radicans</i> Trumpet Vine | 10 - 40 ft | Sun | Very vigorous vine with trumpet-shaped flowers Attracts bees, butterflies and hummingbirds Can be very invasive |
| <i>Euonymus fortunei</i> Wintercreeper | 12 ft | Sun or shade | Evergreen |
| <i>Hedera</i> English Ivy | 10 - 30 ft | Afternoon shade | Evergreen vine for shady locations |
| <i>Hydrangea anomala</i> subsp. <i>petiolaris</i> | 10 - 30 ft | Light shade | Woody vine with exfoliating, shaggy bark Fragrant white flowers |
| <i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i> Virginia Creeper | 20 - 50 ft (10 ft per year) | Sun to deep shade | Fast-growing vine Will cling to any rough surface and spread quite vigorously Creates dense screen |
| <i>Parthenocissus tricuspidata</i> Boston Ivy | 20 - 50 ft (10 ft per year) | Sun to deep shade | Vigorous vine that will cling to brick, stucco, stone and rough wood without support Foliage turns brilliant shades of scarlet and |
| <i>Schizophragma hydrangeoides</i> False Hydrangea Vine | 20 - 30 ft | Shade | Vigorous climber New leaves are light green with whitish underside |

| Plant Name | Height | Sun | Comments |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Twining Vines | | | |
| <i>Akebia quinata</i> Five-leaf Akebia | 25 - 40 ft | Sun or part shade | Vigorous, woody vine Good on trellis or as groundcover Finely textured foliage Large purple fruits in fall |
| <i>Aristolochia durior</i> Dutchman's Pipe | 30 ft (6 ft per year) | Sun or part shade | Creates dense screen Large, heart-shaped leaves Heavy vine requiring strong support Yellow-green flowers Larval food for Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly |
| <i>Celastrus scandens</i> American Bittersweet | 30 ft (10 ft per year) | Sun or part shade | Must plant more than one plant for good fruit production Fruits are orange and yellow Attracts birds Heavy vine requiring strong support Native vine |
| <i>Lonicera</i> Honeysuckle | 10 - 20 ft (6 ft per year) | Sun or part shade | Many varieties Very fragrant flowers Attracts hummingbirds |
| <i>Polygonum aubertii</i> Silverlace Vine | 10 - 30 ft | Sun | One of the fastest growing vines Great masses of foamy white flowers |
| <i>Wisteria</i> Wisteria | 10 - 40 ft (8 ft per year) | Sun | Very vigorous grower that requires a large, strong support for best growth Beautiful vine with large, pendulous flower clusters Flowers just before leaves emerge |
| Tendrilled Vines | | | |
| <i>Ampelopsis brevipedunculata</i> Porcelainberry vine | 10 - 30 ft | Sun or part shade | Vigorous, heavy vine Blue inedible fruit Attracts birds |

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