

Colorful Climbers

There are plenty of choices for you, as a gardener, when you desire a climbing or vining plant. Vines are an excellent way to go vertical in the garden and add interest with flower, foliage and even fruit. Carefully consider what you are looking for to help make your choice a successful one.

- Are you growing this vine in sun/shade/part shade?
- Do you want foliage in the winter or something deciduous?
- Are you looking for a seasonal (annual) vine with lots of color?
- What structure or surface do you have for them to climb on?
- Spring bloom? Summer bloom? Fall color?
- How much area are you trying to cover? Can you prune to control size?

Vines can be easily trained onto just about anything – a trellis, fence, arbor, obelisk/art piece or just about any outdoor structure that you like. Keep in mind that all vines need support. Most will attach themselves without much training, while others will need to be tied to the desired structure. Some even root directly into wood, brick or even concrete and require little tying. Vines could even be used as a sprawling ground-cover or grown onto the trunk of a tree!

All vines thrive in good soil with adequate drainage and some regular fertilizing - always add a dose of organic rose/flower food in early spring and early summer, at minimum. Food can be applied at the base of the plant and watered in or covered with a fresh layer of compost/mulch. With the seasonal/annual vines listed below, utilize a good water-soluble food like Sea Grow every 2 weeks to achieve maximum flower power.

Now let us explore some options for colorful climbing vines for our Western Washington gardens...

Hardy Vines for Garden Use Year After Year

Clematis: The queen of all flowering vines with countless options in color and size - many species and hundreds of hybrids are available. Remember to plant your Clematis about 2” deeper in the ground, then it is in the pot, when transplanting - it helps protect the crown. They love rich, well-drained garden soil with lots of compost. Also note that Clematis love hot tops and cool roots when planted. All are perennial or deciduous, except the first two noted below.

- **Clematis armnadii**: An evergreen Clematis that is one of few hardy evergreen vines we can grow in Western Washington. They display fragrant, white, spring blossoms and grow vigorously in partial shade/morning sun.
- **Clematis catmanii ‘Avalanche’**: Another evergreen type with a nice dissected smaller foliage and white spring flowers that prefers partial shade.

- **Clematis alpina:** A spring blooming species with cute little nodding flowers. Few options for named varieties/colors.
- **Clematis tangutica:** The “Orange Peel Clematis” with nodding, yellow, spring blooms and attractive seed heads for added interest.
- **Clematis terniflora or paniculata:** The “Sweet Autumn Clematis” types that have outstanding, fragrant, white blooms in late summer and the fall. They get big and are great for growing along fences or up into larger trees.
- **Clematis montana:** Spring bloomers in white and pink that have a light fragrance and a bonus of excellent fall color. A big grower for large spaces and into trees. Few choices on varieties.
- **Clematis hybrids:** There are hundreds of choices available for spring and summer blooms, in varying colors, sizes and growth habits. Be sure to note what variety you purchase and if it is a new wood bloomer, old wood bloomer or does it bloom on both. Also look at sun preferences on specific varieties as some prefer shade, some partial shade, some full sun.
- **Clematis Vancouver Series:** A newer hybrid series with a tidier size and nice flowers that are easy to grow in the PNW. ‘Fragrant Star’ even smells good!
- **Clematis Boulevard Series:** A wonderful series of hybrid clematis with heavy blooming and smaller statures. They were bred for smaller spaces, they thrive as container specimens as well, and come in a range of colors.

Honeysuckles: Honeysuckles offer great color and often sweet fragrance to the garden. Most bloom from mid to late spring through summer and are excellent climbers. They are the best for attracting hummingbirds! Lots of choices like ‘Hall’s’ (white/yellow), ‘Goldflame’ (pink/yellow), Trumpets (orange or red or coral) and many more. Be sure to plant in mostly sunny locations and give them room to grow. They can be pruned to control size their size after bloom, or lightly coming out of winter. These can also be used as a sprawling ground-cover.

Akebia: The “Chocolate Vine”. Available in white or purple spring blooms, although white is the better choice for mildew resistance. Mostly evergreen and aggressive (it will cover vast areas), it also easy to cut back. Can grow in sun all the way to mostly shade locations. Interesting seed pods develop after blooms on older plants, which adds interest as well.

Wisteria: Largest of the flowering vines with huge, fragrant, spectacular blossom clusters that hang down in late spring to early summer. There is nothing more impressive than a Wisteria in full flower! There are Chinese, Japanese or American varieties available in whites, pinks, lavenders, blues and purples. These are super aggressive, so be careful where you plant yours in the landscape and give it a heavy duty structure to wrap around. Don’t be bashful with the pruning either! They should be cut back at least once in winter to remove the wispy growth, leaving the older, thicker branches to bloom and keeping the vine tidy and controlled.

Holboellia: The “Sausage Vine”. A great choice when you desire a fragrant, evergreen vine for shade/mostly shade. Produces sweet scented white to cream blossoms in late winter through spring, with sausage-shaped edible fruit (on older plants) for added summer interest. ‘Cathedral Gem’ and ‘Heavenly Ascent’ are two great named varieties that are typically available. Prune in spring to control size after flowering.

Climbing Hydrangea: A large growing deciduous vine that has large, white lacecap flowers in late spring into summer. These will root right into most surfaces - wood, brick, or concrete – and attach themselves. These are big plants, perhaps even covering 100 feet if you let them! Also makes a great ground-cover with the ability to cover a large area. These are deciduous and bloom on old wood, so prune to tidy up in the winter but not too far or you will cut blooming wood off. Green leafed ones will take any amount of sun, with adequate water. Variegated selections like ‘Miranda’ or ‘Firefly’ have attractive variegated foliage but prefer some afternoon shade. They have awesome peeling winter bark as well.

Evergreen Climbing Hydrangeas: Evergreen species like *Hydrangea seemanii* and *Hydrangea integrifolia* keep their leaves over winter and have the same white lacecap style flower. These prefer mostly shade and are right on the hardiness line for Western Washington – keep them planted in a sheltered spot. The both do nicely climbing up into trees, as they root right into the wood.

Schizophragma: This Japanese Climbing Hydrangea is another choice for part shade and shade. Has great foliage color and white or pink lacecap flowers are available. These will cling to fences, root easily and sport cool peeling bark like their American counterparts. Look for ‘Moonlight’ with sweet variegated foliage, or ‘Red Rhapsody’ with a nice touch of red foliage in spring. They are smaller growing as well for smaller areas.

Climbing Roses: Nothing ever beats the color and fragrance of the climbing rose for all summer blooms in a sunny location. Lots of options to meet your preferred taste! Modern climbers re-bloom all summer into fall - these need a structure that you can tie them to for height and can be pruned easily in spring to tidy up rose structure without sacrificing flowers. Keep them fed with organic rose food every 6 weeks in growing season to maximize bloom and health, and be prepared for occasional spraying for mildew, black spot and aphids.

Passion Vines: Most Passion Vine species are tropical and can be grown as annuals in sun. ‘Blue Crown’ is a hardy variety for Western Washington and in a cold winter it may die to the ground, but will then start as a perennial the next season. These have spectacular intricate flowers that must be seen to believe, blooming with summer heat in a nice sunny, well-drained location. Be sure to feed them for maximum growth and flower each season.

Star Jasmine: A nice white, fragrant, summer bloomer that is evergreen and loves heat. These are right on the hardy zone in our area – most of the time they are fine, but sometimes need to be pruned back in spring to encourage recovery after cold winter. They are worth growing as an annual, if you ask me, and if they come through the winter it is even better! The variety ‘Madison’ seems to be the hardiest option these days.

Campsis: The “Trumpet Vine”. These are aggressive vines that love heat and bloom red/orange/yellow color toned flowers in summer. Produces perfect trumpet-shaped flowers for the hummingbirds! These are big and would cover a long sunny fence line, for example. If you have the room great, but keep in mind many gardeners may call these a bit invasive. The newer ‘Summer Jazz’ series are grafted and less aggressive/suckering.

Boston Ivys/Virginia Creeper: These are all about foliage and fall color. Think Ivy League colleges, as they are usually the vines covering all those colonial brick buildings. They will root right into wood, concrete or brick and cover anything with a lush layer of foliage. Produce brilliant red colors in the fall. Drive along I-90 on the Eastside? These are the vines growing on the freeway walls and overpasses.

Golden Hops: A bright yellow foliage vine that grows rapidly each season. Utilize it in a shady or morning sun location for sweet color. Feel free to prune them hard to control size each spring, or let it take over an area if you have the room.

Edibles: Don't forget about grapes and kiwis, two great edibles that grow on vines in sunshine. Lots of good wine and table grape options that are all self-fertile. Kiwis can be hardy grape type, fuzzy, or super hardy Arctic varieties. Arctic ones have striking variegated leaves and like more shade. Be sure to choose a self-fertile variety, or plant both a male and female for fruit production. Best self-fertile varieties these days are 'Kiwi Magic' and 'Sweet N' Solo'.

Annual Vines – Maximum Flower Power for the Season

Mandevillea: A tropical vine that blooms white, pink or red with gorgeous, large flowers throughout the warm season. Awesome on a small trellis in a sunny spot or grown in a container on a cool obelisk or art piece. Keep fed for maximum growth and bloom with a water soluble fertilizer like Sea Grow every couple weeks and deadhead as needed. Has nice color in hanging baskets or as a spiller in containers.

Thunbergia: Commonly known as Black Eyed Susan Vine, it is a great annual vine available in various colors for serious summer blooms. A nice addition for a sunny trellis, a container, or hanging basket. Keep fed with a water soluble fertilizer like Sea Grow every 2 weeks for best results. You may even see one grow 6 feet in a good summer!

Rhodochiton: A cool annual vine that has unusual purple and black tubular flowers. These are called "Purple Bell Vines" and bloom from summer into fall. Has nice heart-shaped green leaves. Feed regularly with a water soluble fertilizer like Sea Grow for best growth and blooms. Use in hanging baskets as a cool annual or as a container plant trained on a small obelisk or trellis.