

Did you know...?

Romaine lettuce is used in the Passover Seder. The bitter-tasting plant symbolizes the bitter cruelty inflicted by the Egyptians on Israelite slaves.

—*SOURCE: Wikipedia*

VINES

Vines provide vertical artistry and are perfect if the depth of a soil bed is narrow. Their habit alleviates the typical squat at a home's front foundation. While upright, vines have modest height and a contained habit. They are perfect for a fence or brick wall.

At the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden on the mall in Washington, U.S. National Park Service gardeners planted ivy in a bed atop the tall wall that surrounds the courtyard. Naturally, the ivy's runners tumbled over the wall to the soil bed below. Then, they planted *Ipomoea* (**morning glory**) in the bed off the courtyard and let those runners climb into the ivy. Passersby, including our landscape design class, wondered what this flowering broad-leafed vine was. It was an interesting concept, letting the "runners" run and mixing color to produce a "homemade" knockout.

With vines, know their winter habit. If a vine is deciduous, you'll be looking at a flimsy, brittle, blanket of stems come winter. So be patient with a vine's dormant state, which is front-and-center when "standing" in your garden.

I'll mention some vines I've installed for customers and you can pick one. Remember, just type in the Latin or English spelling of a plant in any computer search window and you'll find thousands of entries from which to click and observe. We live in USDA Plant Hardiness Zone 6b-7. If you find a vine you like that requires colder temperatures (Zones 1-5) or warmer temperatures (Zones 8-12), they won't be optimum performers in our summer heat or winter chill. Buying a plant on the fringe of our zone (5 or 8) may work. Just about every web site includes photographs and information you may access.

Clematis "Jackmanii" (Virgin's Bower)

Global warming pushes plants to bloom past their scheduled

times, regardless of plant hardiness zone. On Thanksgiving 2007, the temperature in Gainesville, Va. was in the 30s so the overnight chill had to be in the mid-20s. Regardless, a *Clematis* I noticed bore three white flowers flecked with lavender as it twined around a lamppost. December was 10 days away and this *summer* bloomer was vigorous!

The vine of a *Clematis* is herbaceous and fragile, yet vigorous enough where it will twine up a lamppost, fencepost, trellis or old broom handle if you have an English garden. The flower petal is star-shaped and blooms in violet, white, and lavender. The mid-green leaves are very soft, 2 inches long and grow in lanceolate shapes. *Clematis* can be full of flower one summer and without a bloom the next. My mother's *Clematis* one summer featured over 50 lavender blooms and the next summer, none. Absolutely nothing changed about her vine's culture. *Clematis's* flower is bisexual (having both male and female sex organs). What might have happened was a fluke in pollination between the pistils and stamens.

Clematis comes in deciduous or evergreen form among 200 species. The plant will grow in sun or part shade but the roots need to remain cool. If possible, shield the root zone from afternoon sun.

Wisteria floribunda (Flowering Wisteria)

Its main stem is the opposite of *Clematis*. *Wisteria's* twining vine is as thick as your pinky finger. The woody, deciduous plant produces fragrant racemes of lavender flowers in spring and summer. Then again, I've seen *Wisteria* bloom in mid-November! The leaves are pinnate and lime-green and grow off thin stems. Once the vine is established, the runners can be radically pruned in late summer.

Wisteria never obeys a stop sign. Violet, a customer of mine off Braddock Road in Alexandria, had a 100-foot *Quercus* (oak) tree in her backyard. Somehow, there was a *Wisteria* planted near its base. One May morning, I walked into her back yard and looked up at the dominant oak. *Wisteria* runners in full bloom had scrambled throughout the *Quercus* branches. The entire canopy — a giant lavender mushroom — remains one of the most beautiful displays of

flower I've seen. My mother loved wisteria and I took her by for a look. She was awed but later underwhelmed when she returned to her patio-sized *Wisteria*.

Gelsemium sempervirens (Carolina Jasmine)

Five-lobed yellow flowers sit upon opposite pairs of leaves in spring and summer. The evergreen's funnel-shaped bloom with an orange throat is fragrant and grows in part shade or full sun. Its flower size and shape resemble *Jasminum nudiflorum* (winter jasmine), which blooms on trailing stems in late January.

Hydrangea petiolaris (Climbing Hydrangea)

This rugged-looking deciduous vine is cinnamon and exfoliates. The specimen bears domed, white flowers in summer. The leaves are ovate and dark green but turn yellowish in autumn. The vine espaliers against a trellis, fence, or wall. It isn't flimsy like some drooping vine foliage. Instead, these sturdy stems attach to anything.

Pyracantha (Firethorn)

Another sturdy vine, *Pyracantha*, espaliers better than any other vine in the landscape. Armed with thorns, there isn't much that will stop it. It offers shelter for birds with its tight and thick growth habit. In the fall, the specimen fruits in orange, red or yellow spherical clusters. The "Mohave" cultivar has orange fruit and is commonly sold in our area. Firethorn has elliptic, dark evergreen foliage that contrasts well with its fruit color. Tiny, white flowers bloom in corymbs shapes in summer. It grows in sun or shade. Visit the base of the pedestrian bridge at the end of Preston Avenue in Park Fairfax that leads to Shirlington. The concrete abutment is covered with espaliered *Pyracantha*.

Lonicera (Honeysuckle)

This deciduous or evergreen climber comes in 180 species. Flowers are fragrant and tubular and show in orange, white, pink, and yellow. Foliage is thick and can be invasive, as can the flower fragrance, which will overwhelm on a summer day. *Lonicera x brownie* has bluish-green leaves and whirls of 2-lipped, fragrant, orange-red flowers in summer.

Before the terminal floral tip opens like a bugle, the long throat of the flower resembles a miniature pipe cleaner.

Mandevilla splendens

This is the only “annual” vine I mention. Like annual bedding plants, you can purchase this vine in mid-April and appreciate its beauty until December. Because of this, they’re not cheap. A 6-foot-tall *Mandevilla* will cost \$70 but you are buying a mature vine that will soon cover a fence panel or façade in your patio.

A native to Brazil, *Mandevilla* flowers in dark pink, red, or white. The blooms are 5-lobed and 4 inches in diameter, have yellow “eyes” and whitish-yellow throats. Before its flower opens, *Mandevilla*’s bloom is a long, funnel. But the leaf may be just as attractive. Shaped like a football, 5 inches long and 3 inches wide, it is glossy, undulating, and puckered. The flower likes full sun but if you can shield it from the midday sun, that would help.

Customers have brought the plant inside in winter to preserve it with mixed success. Still, for up to eight months of picturesque art in your garden, it’s well-worth the expense. Can you imagine driving around the Brazilian country and seeing this flowering vine growing wild?

Lathyrus grandiflora (Everlasting Pea)

Native to southern Italy and northern Africa, this herbaceous perennial produces fuchsia-purplish, fragrant flowers in summer. Its petals have rounded ears and each bloom resembles Mickey Mouse’s face. The light-green leaves grow densely in an opposite pattern off the stem. Surrounding a lamppost, the stems will fall away in a graceful, not just vertical, habit. The vine grows in full sun or dappled shade. Deadhead the blooms for repeat flowering. Slugs and snails like to lunch on the base of the vine, so sprinkle some rough-edged stone, bits of glass or beer in the soil to deter pests.

WATERING

Overhead sprinklers water the leaves, not the roots, leading to powdery mildew and a breeding ground for fungi. Sprinklers are for lawns, children, some dogs, and 100-degree days, not plants.

I remove the nozzle before watering. Spray selections are useless, since all one needs is a steady stream. Watch for the dirt or mulch to “bubble” and you’ll know you’ve soaked the area sufficiently. Always aim the hose end in a low, circular pattern around the base of the plant.

Consider the weather. During July, you’ll need to water more since the root zone is losing moisture rapidly. In November, more moisture is retained in the soil, so water less. On a cloudy summer day, water less. When clouds have blocked the sun all day, the root ball hasn’t lost as much moisture so it needs less irrigation. On a windy day, water a little more since a steady breeze will sweep moisture out of the soil. Remember, water is essential for mineral intake from the soil and photosynthesis during the growing season.

Try not to over-water. How much is too much? Watch the watered area. If it looks “bone dry” or if you can’t stick your finger or trowel into the soil, keep watering. If your foot starts to sink in the soil, back off. Too much water robs the plant of oxygen. I have seen situations where a new tree planting listed at 45 degrees because a hose was left running at its base for just 5 minutes. The root zone became mush and the tree’s ball was as loose as a tooth and couldn’t stand straight up. That is over watering! So oftentimes, just use common sense when watering.

Never aim the hose at the inside of the bush, unless you are spraying off lacebugs on azaleas. If you water the inside of a specimen, moisture will remain there on a cloudy or humid day. Overnight

fungus may manifest. Plus, a wet environment invites pest infestation through the soil, air, or stem. Foliage needs to stay dry unless rainwater is the culprit.

If a plant is on a slope, water the high side of the ball, but slowly. If you have a planting bed in a swale, be cautious of water gathering because this will inhibit drainage. Specimens such as *Populus deltoids* (**eastern cottonwood**) or *Betula* (**birch**) prefer what is called “wet feet,” which means their roots don’t mind sitting in excess water. However, very few specimens tolerate soggy root zones.

