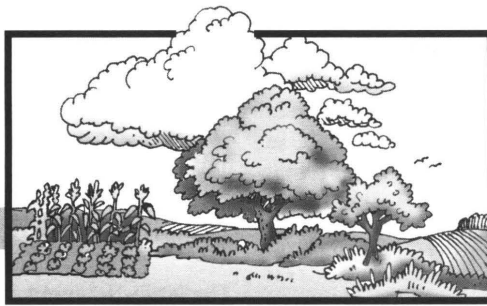


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# Selecting Landscape Plants - Ornamental Vines

*Diane Relf and Bonnie Appleton\**

Vines serve many useful landscaping purposes. Where space is limited, vines may be used as dividers or barriers. They can screen unsightly views or provide privacy for the patio or porch.

The monotony of a long fence or blank wall may be broken with vines. They can soften harsh structural lines and blend the structure with other plantings. On steep banks and in other areas where grass is difficult to establish and maintain, vines may be used as ground covers. They can be established on trellises against buildings to provide shade, thereby improving energy efficiency for cooling.

## Selection

Selection of a suitable vine depends on its intended use, location, soil adaptability, and type of support. Dense, coarse foliage is desirable if a screen is needed. A fine-textured, slow-growing vine should be selected to add pattern and interest to a stone or brick wall. A decorative vine should possess desirable flowers, fruit, or foliage for seasonal interest.

## Types

Vines are of three different types according to their method of climbing - whether by tendrils, twining, or clinging. **The kind of support required is determined by the growth habit of the vine selected.**

Tendrils are slim, flexible, leafless stems that wrap themselves about anything they contact. The grape is probably the best known vine that climbs by means of tendrils. Twining vines, such as wisteria, wind their stems around any available support. Clinging vines climb by means of either tendrils with disk-like adhesive tips that attach themselves to any surface or by means of small aerial rootlets along the stems that attach themselves into crevices of a rough-textured surface. Examples of clinging vines include English ivy and euonymus.

## Vine Supports

Twining and tendril-type vines climb best on wires, trellises, and arbors. They can be grown on solid, vertical surfaces only if proper supports are provided.

Although clinging vines can be used on brick or masonry walls, they can erode cement between bricks and weaken the wall. They should never be used on walls of frame buildings as their method of climbing can cause damage. These vines cling so closely to the wall that moisture is likely to collect under them and cause the wood to rot. Grow clinging vines on trellises far enough from the siding of wood structures to allow free air circulation behind the vines. The trellis should be movable to permit painting the siding without damaging the vine. Clinging vines are particularly valuable on concrete exposures such as along highways or commercial buildings.

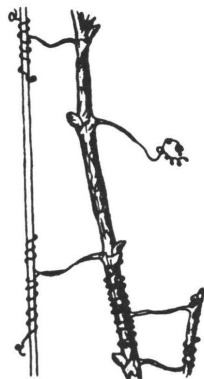


Figure 1. Some vines have tendrils which wrap around any type of support.



Figure 2. The twining vines climb by winding their stems around any available support.

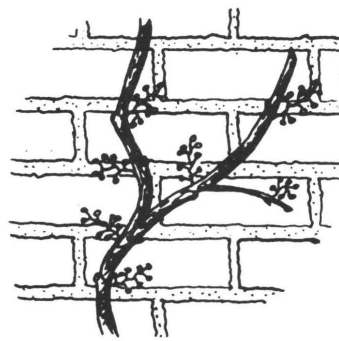


Figure 3. Some clinging vines climb by means of tendrils with disk-like adhesive tips which attach to any surface.

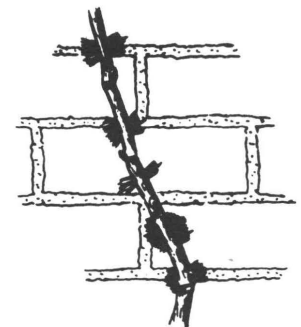


Figure 4. Other clinging vines attach themselves to surfaces with small aerial rootlets along the stem.

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Vine supports should be constructed with sturdy, durable materials. Wire, tubing, or wood may be used to make suitable support. Copper or aluminum wire or tubing is preferred over other metals, because these materials will not rust. Use pressure-treated wood or treat wood with a preservative that is not toxic to plants to make it last longer.

## Culture

Plant bare-rooted vines in the spring before new growth starts. Plants growing in containers may be planted anytime during the year.

Young vines should be trained to provide the desired growth pattern. New stems may need to be fastened into position by tying with a soft cloth.

Some vines grow rampant and appear overgrown unless severely pruned at frequent intervals. Only when a naturalistic effect is desired, and there is adequate space, should vines be allowed to grow freely.

Vines may develop sparse foliage low on the trellis and develop a mass of foliage at the top. To prevent this, pinch back the terminal growth of the stems as they develop. Pinching forces lower branching and more uniform distribution of foliage on the trellis.

Vines growing poorly should be fertilized in early spring or late fall. One cup of a 5-10-5 or similar analysis fertilizer should be worked into the soil around each vine.

## Recommended Vines

The following vines tend to stay in their bounds and are less aggressive than some faster-growing ornamental vines. As with any vine, these would benefit from periodic pruning, though it is usually not necessary.

### Climbing Hydrangea *Hydrangea anomala* subsp. *petiolaris*

An excellent landscape vine with very showy, flat-topped flower clusters in summer; glossy, dark-green leaves; and exfoliating winter bark, it is slow to establish but once well-rooted grows rapidly with clinging roots that will attach to structures and supports. It may grow 60 to 80 feet, so use a sturdy support. It may have difficulty in the Tidewater area due to heat and drought; use on a northern or eastern exposure.

### Boston Ivy *Parthenocissus tricuspidata*

Boston ivy is one of the best vines for covering structures or supports quickly. It is a fast-growing, close-clinging vine that climbs by means of adhesive disks that have the potential to damage masonry walls and buildings. The vine is tolerant of many soil types and grows in full sunlight or in shade.

Boston ivy grows to a height of 50 to 60 feet. Its bright-green leaves stand out and overlap on long stalks. Leaves turn rich tones of scarlet, orange, or purple in the fall. The new growth in spring is reddish-bronze.

The flowers are inconspicuous but attract a large number of bees. The bluish-black berries are attached to the vine in grape-like clusters. These persist after the leaves have fallen.

The vine is well adapted to city conditions. When given free reign, the vine will cover windows, doors, or other objects in

its path. It requires annual pruning. Boston ivy is easily transplanted. Start with two-year-old plants.

### Clematis *Clematis* spp.

Clematis is among the most decorative and spectacular of all the flowering vines. A wide range of color and flower shape may be found in the many varieties and species offered for sale.

The large-flowered clematis hybrids are the most widely used. These hybrids are deciduous vines that climb by twining stems, which act as tendrils. They attain a height of 8 to 10 feet. Flowering time varies according to variety but may be from late spring until frost.

The Sweet Autumn Clematis, *Clematis dioscoreifolia robusta* (*C. paniculata*) is a more vigorous species that grows to 20 or 30 feet. It is an easy vine to grow and is popular for the masses of fragrant, white flowers produced in late August and September.

Clematis prefer a light, loamy, well-drained soil with a pH between 6.5 and 7. Lime should be added if soil pH is below pH 6.5. They require constant soil moisture.

Clematis grows well in full sun or partial shade. Preferably, the foliage should be exposed to full sun and the soil kept cool and shaded by low ground-cover plants or mulch. Vines grow well on the East Side of a wall, but not on the north. Protection from strong winds is also desirable.

Proper pruning time depends upon variety. Those, which bloom on previous year's wood, should be pruned immediately after flowering. Most types bloom on growth made during the current year and should be pruned in early spring before new growth starts. Pruning is usually not necessary during the first two years after planting.

When planting, the crown of the plant should be set 2 inches below the soil surface. Support, such as a bamboo stake, must be provided immediately to prevent breakage of the brittle stems. A light lattice trellis is one of the best supports for clematis.

The landscape uses of clematis are many. They are excellent accent vines when trained on arbors, light wires, or delicate trellises but are also effective when allowed to trail over rocks, stone walls, or fences.

### Wintercreeper Euonymus *Euonymus fortunei*

Note: *Euonymus fortunei* can be an invasive plant in warmer climates (zone 7+).

Wintercreeper euonymus is a handsome evergreen vine growing to 15 to 20 feet. This shrubby vine climbs by means of aerial rootlets. It attaches to any upright support or roots on the soil surface to form a near mat. The species seldom flowers or produces fruit. However, several varieties available are valued for their pink-capsuled fruits which split open to expose orange seeds. The rich, dark-green, leathery leaves of some types turn a bronzy-green in the fall.

Wintercreeper grows slowly in the shade but prefer some shade during the summer if located in full sun. The plant is tolerant to all soil conditions but prefers soil that is moist and well supplied with organic matter.

Wintercreepers are useful for training against walls, as ground covers, and for climbing over low walls and on tree trunks. The vine may be allowed to completely cover a wall or may be thinned out to give a tailored tracery. Varieties of varying leaf form and fruiting ability are available. Growth habits and cultural requirements of these are essentially the same. *Euonymus* scale is their most serious pest.

## Potentially Invasive Introduced or Alien Vines

The following vines are considered “aggressive” and certain species can be invasive by rapid growth, and prolific seed production and germination. Be prepared to work to keep these vines in bounds. Ranking in parenthesis indicates the invasiveness level in natural areas and native plant habitats attributed to the vine by the Virginia Native Plant Society and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

### English Ivy

### *Hedera helix*

English ivy is a handsome evergreen vine, climbing by attaching itself to rough surfaces by very short aerial rootlets. It may attain a height of 20 to 50 feet, unfortunately this is usually in to trees where it can be very damaging.

The rich, leathery, dark, shiny leaves hold their color all winter if protected from winter sun and wind. North- or east-facing walls are the most satisfactory locations. English ivy prefers a shady location with a fairly moist soil, well supplied with organic matter. Flowers are only produced on old vines that have reached a mature condition. They are greenish and small, followed by 1/4-inch, blue-black fruit in large clusters that persist for several months.

The landscape uses of English ivy are many, both indoors and outdoors. As a ground cover in the shade or under trees and shrubs, it is an excellent broadleaved evergreen, but should not be allowed to grow up trees. On vertical, flat surfaces, interesting patterns are formed during its first few years of growth. It is not suitable for covering walls with a southern exposure because of the intense summer heat and winter sun.

Baltic English Ivy (*Hedera helix* ‘Baltica’) is a more hardy variety recommended for its ability to better withstand winter conditions. (Medium)

### Honeysuckle

### *Lonicera* spp. (*L. japonica* High)

Only a few of the climbing honeysuckles are generally available and suitable for landscape use. Most frequently found are the Hall’s Japanese honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica* ‘Halliana,’ and trumpet honeysuckle, *Lonicera heckrottii*. The Italian woodbine, *Lonicera caprifolium*, is also sometimes available.

Hall’s Japanese honeysuckle is a semi-evergreen vine with wiry stems. It climbs 20 to 30 feet by twining, or forms a ground cover by rooting at the joints. It is a rampant vine that easily grows out of bounds and becomes a pest unless carefully controlled. Flowers open white and turn pale yellow. They are produced from June to September. Black berries produced in the fall are of little ornamental value. It should not be placed where it can climb on other plants or trees. It needs annual pruning to keep it in bounds.

The trumpet honeysuckle is a loose-growing vine with twining stems and semi-evergreen, bluish-green leaves. Scarlet trumpet-shaped flowers are produced from May to August at the ends of the branches. A yellow-flowered form is also available. Red fruits attract the birds in early fall. It will grow 15 to 20 feet high.

Everblooming honeysuckle is a semi-shrubby vine that climbs up to 15 feet by twining. It is somewhat spreading, with blue-green leaves and carmine flower buds that open to show deep yellow inside the trumpet. It is slow growing and can be grown either on a trellis or trained as a shrub. Flowers are produced from June until September.

The sweet honeysuckle has oval to elliptic leaves that are bluish beneath. It is less common than the other types listed here but, along with the Tellmann honeysuckle, would be suitable for landscape use if available.

The climbing honeysuckles are among the easiest plants to grow in the garden. They will thrive either in sun or shade. Although they perform best in good, well-drained garden soil, they will tolerate poor soils. However, they do not tolerate wet, boggy conditions.

Honeysuckles stand severe pruning and can be cut back to 6 to 8 inches if they have grown out of bounds or need rejuvenation. Although a few insects and diseases may attack honeysuckles, they usually are not serious problems.

### China Fleece Vine or Silver-Lace Vine

### *Polygonum aubertii*

This vine produces clusters of small; white to greenish-white flowers in August and September, which turn pinkish at maturity and remain effective for a long time. The dense foliage is bright green. Although not listed by the Virginia Native Plant Society as invasive, the vine is a rank grower and is becoming invasive in some areas. Once established, it may grow as much as 20 feet in a single season. It will require severe pruning each spring to keep it within bounds. It is adaptable to many soil types and is suitable for city conditions. It needs a sunny location.

### Wisteria

### *Wisteria* spp.

The wisterias are vigorous, twining vines that grow to 25 or 30 feet. These vines are most valued for their long, pendant clusters of violet-blue flowers. Varieties are available which produce flowers of varying colors (from white to pink to deep reddish and bluish-violet). Bean-like, velvety pods remain after the leaves fall, but are not particularly ornamental. All wisterias will bloom, but some vines take as long as 7 to 15 years to produce their first flowers. Excessive nitrogen fertilizer may stimulate leaf and stem growth at the expense of flower production. The following practices may help induce flowering: (1) an application of superphosphate in early spring, (2) severe pruning of the new growth in late spring or early summer, and (3) root pruning by cutting some of the roots with a spade a few feet from the trunk in late fall. Grafted plants or plants that have flowered in the nursery are recommended to ensure earlier bloom.

Wisterias are excellent vines for training on stoutly constructed arbors and pergolas. They are best when trained horizontally on a wire or structure 10 to 20 feet above the ground. The vines

are excellent for use on open-structured roofs over patios and terraces. Wisterias may also be grown as standards or trees. To do this, the plant must be staked in an upright position. Remove all branches on the bottom 4 to 5 feet of the trunk and prune the top heavily.

Japanese wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*) (Low) is a rapid-growing vine. It climbs by stems twining from right to left. A twisted, heavy main stem or trunk several inches in diameter is often developed. The shiny, bright-green leaves turn yellow in autumn. The fragrant, pea-like flowers are arranged in clusters 8 to 36 inches long. The flowers open gradually from base to tip of the cluster when the leaves appear. The flower clusters are longer but more open than those of the Chinese wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*). (Medium)

Chinese wisteria is a more vigorous grower than the Japanese wisteria with stems twining from left to right. This is the type most commonly grown in gardens. The flowers appear before the leaves and are slightly fragrant. All flowers on the clusters open at the same time, creating a better display than the Japanese wisteria. Both violet-blue and white forms are available.

A vigorous, flowering vine may be maintained by pruning back long branches to within five buds from their point of origin in early summer. Repeat this pruning in late summer on new shoots that develop. Remove all thin and weak growth immediately after flowering or in late winter. Wisteria prefer a deep, rich, moist, well-drained soil high in organic matter. A sunny location will favor maximum flower production.

(Low to Medium)

## Bittersweet

## *Celastrus* spp.

Two types of bittersweet commonly grown are American bittersweet, *Celastrus scandens*, a native plant, and Oriental bittersweet, *Celastrus orbiculata*.

The American bittersweet is a vigorous vine that grows 10 to 20 feet tall and climbs by means of twining stems. It will thrive in almost any soil or exposure except a wet, boggy situation.

Bittersweet is planted for its attractive fruit, a favorite for dried arrangements. Reddish-yellow fruit capsules split open in early autumn to expose red-orange berries. The fruits are grouped in terminal clusters, which make them conspicuous both before and after the leaves fall.

Bittersweet produces male and female flowers on separate plants. Male and female plants must be grown to ensure fruit set. Male plants are more vigorous growers and usually must be pruned harder than female plants to prevent the berry-producing plants from being crowded out. One male plant should be used for each five female plants.

Bittersweet is not easily transplanted due to the spreading root system; therefore, small, young plants should be used. Plants grow rapidly once established and can become a serious pest if not pruned back to keep them under control. The vines should not be permitted to climb trees or shrubs, as they have the ability to choke them out. Bittersweet occasionally may be infested with euonymus scale, but has few other insect or disease pests.

(High)

## Invasive natives

Though these vines are native (not alien, as the others) they can be very aggressive, also. Much pruning is necessary to keep them under control.

## Trumpet Creeper or Trumpet Vine

## *Campsis radicans*

Common trumpet creeper is a deciduous, robust vine that climbs by both aerial rootlets and twining stems. Growing to a height of 25 to 30 feet, this vine is useful for rustic effects on fence posts, walls, poles, or rock work.

Brilliant orange and scarlet, 2 1/2 to 3 1/2 inches long, the trumpet-shaped flowers are very showy from July through September. The dark-green leaves present a bold, tropical appearance.

Long, cigar-like fruits on bright-tan stems may be considered decorative during the winter months. Common trumpet creeper grows well in partial shade. However, a full-sun exposure is required for maximum flower production. It will tolerate both wet and dry soils.

Additional support is sometimes required for this vigorous vine. Tying the heavy branches to a sturdy support and thinning the vine in early spring will prevent strong winds from tearing it down. Pinch back the tips during the growing season to eliminate excessive top growth and promote bushiness.

Common trumpet creeper transplants readily. It is a prolific seed producer and may become a pest if not kept under control. A hybrid variety, 'Madame Galen,' has larger, showier flowers than the common type. Color is salmon-red rather than orange-scarlet.

## Virginia Creeper or Woodbine

## *Parthenocissus quinquefolia*

Virginia creeper is a native, deciduous vine that climbs both by tendrils with adhesive disks that adhere to brick, stone, or tree trunks, and by aerial rootlets that attach only to rough surfaces. It grows 30 to 50 feet tall and has a loose, open growth pattern.

The leaves of Virginia creeper are five-parted and stand out on slender, drooping side branches. They open purplish in the spring, remain a dull, deep green throughout the summer, and turn brilliant scarlet or crimson before dropping in the fall. It is one of the first of all woody plants to display fall color. Inconspicuous, greenish flowers develop into clusters of bluish-black, pea-sized berries in September and October. The berries either fall before winter or are eaten by birds after the leaves drop.

Virginia creeper will grow in a variety of soils and is considered to be a very drought-resistant plant. Thriving either in a sun or shade exposure, Virginia creeper is valued for producing a pleasing pattern on large blank walls, for covering rustic structures, and for covering ground or bank in rocky areas.

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