

Tips for Pruning Clematis Vines

Is it Time to Prune Your Clematis?

(/clematis/c/GE_1003_80/)

First, you must find out which pruning group your variety belongs to. If you bought it from Wayside Gardens, our website or catalog will tell you. If your variety isn't being offered this season give us a call and we'll happily look it up. If you bought yours elsewhere, take a look at any book on Clematis. (*An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Clematis* is an excellent source of information about all things Clematis.)

Group I:

(Bloom in early spring from buds set the previous season on old wood; doesn't die back in winter)

Prune only when needed, after bloom in spring.

Clematis should only be pruned sparingly. They tend to bloom earlier, in the spring. After their bloom show is over you can give them a light pruning. All you want to do is clear out dead wood and keep the stems tidy.

Since this group blooms only on old wood, cutting too low or too early in the season could cost you flowers! Examples of a Group I Clematis are shown here. (/vines-climbers/c/WG_VinesClimbers/filter/100000001152eq100000001153/)



Group II:

(Usually includes rebloomers that produce flowers on old wood in late spring/early summer and often bloom again on new wood in late summer or fall)

In March, remove dead wood and cut the remaining stems 6 to 8 inches to a pair of strong buds.

Clematis should be given a moderate trim. Since they bloom on old and new wood alike, you want to trim enough to encourage new growth, but without losing any promising buds. Remove dead wood and cut back the remaining stems just 6 to 8 inches.

Do this trim in March, before the blooming has begun. This group tends to bloom in the middle of the season, setting flowers on old wood in late spring/early summer and then reblooming on the new wood through late summer or even early fall. This group is a bit more forgiving—even if you prune a bit too harshly, you will still get to enjoy the late-season rebloom! An example of a Group II Clematis is Vancouver Fragrant Star. (/Vancouver-Fragrant-Star-Clematis/p/30699/)

Group III:

(Bloom on new wood in the summer and fall; dies to the ground over winter)

Each year in March, prune all stems back to a strong set of buds 12 inches from the ground.

Clematis are the easiest to prune, since you basically cut the whole thing down! This group goes dormant in the winter, letting the stems die off, and then they grow anew each spring. This means that each year in March you should prune back all the stems to just about 12 inches off the ground to make way for the new growth.

This group will come back strong and will bloom on the new wood each year. Since they have to re-grow their mature size each summer, they tend to be the last to flower, opening in late summer or fall. Examples of a Group I Clematis are shown here. (/vines-climbers/c/WG_VinesClimbers/filter/100000001152eq100000001155/)

Before You Prune Your New Clematis

You aren't going to like this, but the first year of your Clematis's garden (or container!) life, you need to do a special pruning. If you planted your Clematis last spring or fall, or if you've been growing Clematis without pruning it, please give it this first-year trim — it will make your Clematis more beautiful over its entire (long!) life.

Every variety, regardless of group, should be cut back to about 5 inches from the ground in late winter/early spring the first year after it is planted. You don't have to — it will certainly still grow and flower without ever feeling the snick of the shears — but if you want a bushier, stronger, tighter growth habit, with flowers from the base of the plant instead of beginning 4 feet off the ground, cut every stem back to 5 inches from the soil. Don't worry about leaving buds; Clematis handles that sort of thing with underground growth.

Now, the bad news is that if your Clematis is in Groups 1 or 2, this first-year pruning means that you won't get blooms this year. These groups bloom on "old wood" (the previous season's growth), so you'll lose one season of color. But I promise you your Clematis will more than make up for this loss in the years to come!

So — cut every stem that's coming out of the ground to 5 inches tall, even if you've got an old established Clematis that's been twining up a tree for 5 years without a trim, or with random trims at various times of year. (Do you notice it blooms less each year, and perhaps only at the very end of the stems instead of from the base? This pruning will put a stop to that nonsense and give you lots of blooms, all along the stems!) **That's it — your work is done for the year!**

Now, if your Clematis is in Groups 1 (</309/a/309>) or 2 (</310/a/310>), you should also do a special second-year pruning. Not everyone does this, but if you want a lush, many-stemmed, bloom-happy plant, **the second year you should prune all stems back to about 3 feet from the ground in late winter/early spring.** You will get blooms this year, because everything above 5 inches from the ground is old wood, but your Clematis won't grow so tall so quickly. Again, this is all to the good — it will encourage more shoots to emerge and better flowering in years to come — but if you're too impatient or simply forget, most Clematis are very forgiving!

If your Clematis is in Group 3 (</311/a/311>), skip the second-year pruning. Your variety blooms on new wood, so this pruning is completely unnecessary.

Once you know your Clematis's pruning number and get that first-year trim out of the way, keeping this woody climber looking its best and blooming like crazy is simple! A few minutes once a year will yield you armloads of flowers for many seasons, and you will continue to find new uses for Clematis, from hiding an unsightly fence to decorating your most formal garden art!

[Shop Clematis](#)

[Group 1](#)

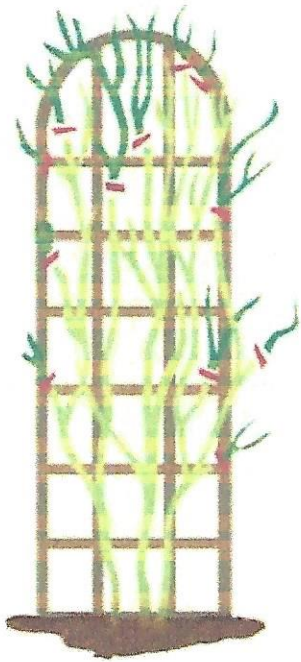
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Queen of the climbers

CLEMATIS PRUNING GUIDE

Make sure that you are pruning your vine properly based on its blooming habit, because improper pruning can set your blooms show back a year or more!

Group I



OLD WOOD



Snowdrift
Clematis

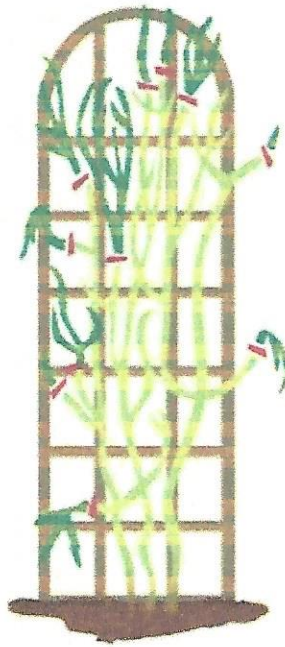
Blooms in early spring from buds set the previous season on old wood. Doesn't die back in winter.

Prune only when needed and sparingly after bloom in **spring**.



Clear out dead wood and keep the stems tidy.

Group II



OLD AND NEW WOOD



Holly
Clematis

Old Wood
Blooms late spring/early summer.

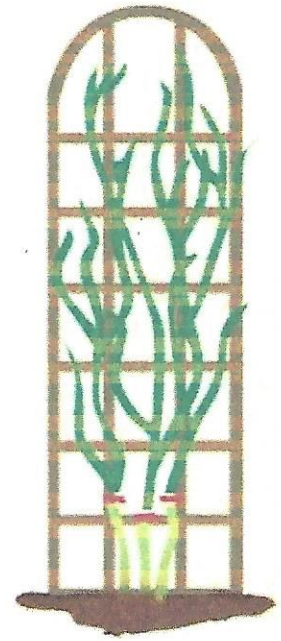
New Wood
Blooms early summer or even early fall.

IN MARCH



Remove dead or cut remaining to **6 to 8** inches from soil.

Group III



NEW WOOD



Betty Corning
Clematis

Blooms in summer and fall. Dies to the ground over winter.

EARLY MARCH



Prune all stems back to a set of buds **12** inches from the ground.



Group 2

Early Summer - Fall



Josephine

Group 2

Early Summer late S



Grows 3

Early Summer Early Fall



Sweet Autumn

Group 3

late Summer mid fall