

Clematis in March

During the month of March you may have some cultivars of clematis that are a little late forming the buds and beginning to swell; however, most buds start forming the later part of February and into March. Almost all of my clematis have buds that are visible by the first part of March. If you haven't already applied your first fertilization, now is the time. I begin fertilizing all my clematis with fertilizer that is high in phosphorus. Use the same fertilizer that you use for roses being careful to follow the directions on the label and ALWAYS water after fertilizing your plants. Our average last killing frost date in Parker County is March 17th; however, if we get a killing frost, your clematis will probably bounce back but to be sure you use row cover to cover your clematis just to be on the safe side.



In the later part of February, you may have noticed the buds on your clematis beginning to swell. You will need to prune the dead stems right above the swollen buds, starting at the top of the clematis and working downward.

The main reasons for pruning clematis are:

- to establish a neat and tidy framework
- to encourage vigorous growth that will make the plants more resistant to disease
- force the root system to grow faster
- stimulate the development of buds and flowers and increase branching

Most newly planted clematis need to be pruned back to at least 12 inches from the ground in spring following the initial planting. This pruning encourages plants to produce new shoots from lower down the stems and from below the soil surface. However, certain evergreen and tender varieties such as *Clematis armandii* should not be severely pruned as I

learned the hard way. Years ago when I first started experimenting with growing clematis, I had a huge established evergreen *Clematis armandii* 'Snowdrift' that had outgrown its trellis so I decided I'd prune it hard and replace the trellis with a larger one. Now I know that this variety needs little or no pruning and only after the flowering period has ended. I don't know if I pruned my plant too hard or if I pruned it at the wrong time of year; regardless, it died. I think if I had

annually pruned my plant slightly and after it had bloomed that I would still be enjoying this beautiful plant; however, we learn from our mistakes.

There are 3 pruning groups for clematis: Group #1, #2, and #3 or sometimes they are referred to Group A, B, and C.

1. Group #1 is NO pruning or pruning optional
2. Group #2 is LIGHT pruning
3. Group #3 is HARD pruning.

Don't be concerned with the methods; the important thing to notice is when the leaf buds swell. **The time to prune is when the leaf buds of the clematis begin to show signs of growth.** This usually occurs sometime in February or March in Parker County. **Weather determines when leaf buds start growing; therefore, this can change from year to year.** I have a Brother's P-touch label maker that I use to make labels for almost all of my clematis. Each label has their variety name and pruning method. An example of a label is:

'Ramona' Clematis
LIGHT pruning

I have noticed in the garden departments of the large home stores that they have several packaged clematis. If you buy these, I suggest that you plant them in a 1 gallon container and keep them protected in a greenhouse or well-lighted garage. Do not plant a newly potted plant outside until about April 1st. If a young plant is planted outside now, it probably will not survive as the new plant will need to be hardened off before it can survive the cold temperatures.

I recommend giving your clematis a bath using liquid seaweed or fish emulsion once a month and being careful to ALWAYS follow the directions on the label. I never use these products in the heat of the day so early morning or late evening is best. Plants love both liquid seaweed and fish emulsion.