

# Clematis...A Gardener's Delight

By: Parker County Master Gardener, Grenetta Bledsoe

Clematis is a member of the Ranunculaceae botanical family of plants that includes buttercups, delphiniums, aquilegias, and hellebores. Most of us grow clematis for its colorful flowers, and there's nothing more gorgeous than clematis in full bloom. Clematis produce single or double flowers in various shapes.

Growing clematis has unfortunately discouraged many gardeners because they are impatient. Clematis is easily grown in a rich, porous, alkaline soil with plenty of room for the roots to spread. In my experience, it takes about three years for clematis to grow into a 'show stopper'. The first few years, the plant is slow to develop top growth because it is establishing its root system. After the first year it may or may not produce a few small flowers. By the second year, there will be more growth and perhaps a few flowers. The third year rewards your patience with substantial growth and vast amounts of blossoms. Purchasing clematis in a one-gallon container is advised because it will have an established root ball and be an older more established plant.

**PRONUNCIATION:** Clematis is pronounced: CLEM-uh-tis. The term cultivar is short for cultivated variety. Cultivars do not come true from seed. Cultivar names are designated by single quotation marks and are always capitalized. An example of this would be the cultivar 'Jackmanii'. Clematis is often referred to as the "Queen of Vines".

**CLEMATIS GROUPING:** Presently, there are three recognized clematis groups: *Montana* Group, *Texensis* Group and *Viticella* Group.

**BLOOMING PERIOD:** The age of your plant, the location in which you have planted it, how often you feed and water it, which cultivar you have planted, and in which USDA zone you live (Parker County is in Zone 7b) are all factors in the blooming time of your clematis. Some years are better than others and sometimes things just happen, for example, one year the squirrels and armadillos played havoc with my clematis. The stems of clematis are very delicate and the squirrels would climb the vines trying to get to a birdfeeder, which contained sunflower seeds. The clematis would act as a stairway up to the birdseed, and the squirrels would literally tear up my clematis vine. Needless to say, I was really upset with those squirrels for damaging my clematis vine until I heard a lecture from a bird expert on the use of safflower seeds over sunflower seeds. I learned that squirrels do not like safflower seeds so from that time on, I've switched to safflower seed in my birdfeeders, and I haven't had a problem with the squirrels damaging my clematis vines. I also found that safflower seed attracts red cardinals, chickadees, and titmouse, which are the very birds I wish to have in my yard. I also found out that sparrows do not like safflower seed so I don't have sparrows at my feeders. Now, armadillos are another story. Armadillos can destroy almost any plant and clematis is no

exception to their rooting destruction. I now place rabbit wire or something similar around the base of my clematis when I first plant them. I have even used two decorative wire coverings that came off the doors of an antique china cabinet...it makes a wonderful shield and support for my clematis vine. However, even with special treatment, some clematis will give you all they have one year and then just seem to sulk the following year, but droughts and weather conditions play an important factor, too. Some take a few years to become established before they bloom satisfactorily while others take off immediately.

**THE BEST TIME TO PLANT CLEMATIS:** All clematis resources that I have read state the best time to plant clematis is in the spring or fall. Just like planting roses, I prefer the fall because of the cooler months and also the weather in the fall will reduce the stress, especially in Texas where the intense summer heat makes it hard to get some plants established if planted in the spring. If you have acquired your plant during the summer months, I suggest that you wait until fall to plant. If you are a novice to growing clematis, it might be wise to leave your clematis in its original nursery container and care for it until fall. Now, if you have purchased clematis from a home improvement center where they usually are sold in a 4" pot secured with a dowel rod, this is NOT advisable. In this case, you should replot the plant in a larger container. If not, you would need to water the plant every day, and even then it is doubtful that your plant would survive in our Texas summer heat. I recommend that you purchase your clematis plant from a nursery rather than a home improvement center. If you order your clematis online, I suggest Donahue's or Chalk Hill Clematis Farm. When you purchase a plant from them, you can plant directly into the ground.

**COMPANION PLANTS:** Clematis and roses make great plant companions as they have the same fertilization and water needs. To help protect clematis from the excessive Texas summer heat, plant clematis with compatible companion plants in filtered shade.

**THE PLANTING SITE:** Clematis prefers a rich, loose, well-drained soil that will permit a free run of the roots. It does best where its tops are in full sun, yet its roots are shaded. The roots must become established before top growth occurs, and it may take two or three seasons for them to reach their full potential. Most clematis in Parker County prefers bright shade locations. Bright shade refers to areas that have partial shade or dappled shade, but never receive direct, continuous sunlight. Direct continuous sunlight bleaches the flowers of clematis, leaving their color dingy and washed-out looking. Magazines and reading resources often advise its readers to add lime to the soil; however, Parker County already has alkaline soil; therefore, adding lime to the soil will increase the alkalinity of the soil and can be harmful to clematis.

**PLANTING YOUR CLEMATIS:** Now, let's pretend it is fall (Late September or October), and it is time to plant your precious clematis vine. Here are the steps:

- Water the clematis plant thoroughly in the container before you plant it.
- Dig a planting hole twice as wide as the pot in which the plant is growing and at least twice as deep. This large hole allows for more room for soil

amendment, if needed, and it gives the roots of your clematis plenty of room to grow and spread.

- The next step in planting should always be preparing the soil. You will need to add soil amendments before planting your clematis. I recommend mixing the displaced topsoil from the planting hole to a mixture of 50% compost and 50% topsoil. I also like to add some expanded shale (about a shovel full), which will help promote good drainage and can improve clay soils. Good drainage is essential. I use a wheelbarrow and mix all three together using a shovel to turn and mix thoroughly.
- Immerse the container in which the plant is growing, in a bucket of water for about ten to fifteen minutes to thoroughly wet the compost and topsoil and enable the uptake of water by the roots. This is a very important step before planting.
- Once you have prepared your soil, make sure you carefully remove the root ball from its container. Never pull your plant out of the container. Gently tilt the container on its side and press on all sides of the container until the plant feels loose. Then, gently remove the plant from its container. Add a sufficient amount of your amended topsoil to the hole so that when you position your clematis it will be three inches to five inches below ground level. You will need to remove any leaves that will be under the soil.
- After placing the clematis in the hole, keep adding the amended soil gently tamping it in until the hole is full. Burying clematis deep gives the plant a second chance to sprout new stems should your clematis suffer from a disease or surface damage.
- Leave the original support stake or trellis in place for at least the first year in order for the clematis to become established.
- Water the clematis thoroughly after planting. I use Maxicrop Liquified Seaweed, being careful to follow the directions on the container. Liquified seaweed will help promote root growth.

**FEEDING:** Your clematis will be happy if you feed it well. A well-fed, healthy plant is more capable of resisting disease and less susceptible to diseases. In Parker County clematis usually come out of dormancy in late March or April. Spring feeding should begin when newly developing leaf stems are about one to two inches long. Feed your clematis when you feed your roses. The final feeding of the year should take place in early September. A feeding later than that could stimulate new growth which might make it susceptible to frost.

**MY SCHEDULE FOR FERTILIZING:** Clematis and roses have the same fertilization and water needs. Around February 14<sup>th</sup>, I fertilize with Rabbit Hill Farm Bunny Trails (Rabbit Manure), being careful to follow the directions on the sack. I like using this product, as it doesn't burn plants even if I don't water it right away. Then, a few weeks later, around the middle of March, I fertilize all my well-established older clematis plants with a fertilizer that has a high phosphorus. On my young clematis plants (less than a year old), I use Rabbit Hill Farms Buds & Blooms (6-8-4). After my clematis bloom, which is usually the middle of April into May, I let them rest awhile before I fertilize

again... I do not fertilize my clematis during our hottest months, which are July and August. I usually do my final fertilizing the middle to last of September because of the intense heat we have in the summer in Texas.

**FERTILIZING TIPS:**

- \* If your clematis gets stressed from the heat, it will have a lot of brown foliage, especially at the bottom of the vine. I usually cut the vines down to about 12 inches, and they usually perk right up, and bloom again in a few weeks.
- \* Always keep any fertilizer away from the stems of your clematis to avoid burning them. Also, be careful not to let the fertilizer touch any of the leaves of the foliage.
- \* Always water thoroughly after applying fertilizer.
- \* Never feed a sick plant. It is not good to stimulate new growth when your plant is sick. It needs to use its energy to recover. If I see a plant looking wilted, I immediately cut it down to the ground. In a few weeks, it usually starts to grow without any sign of the disease reoccurring.
- \* Do not feed a dormant plant.

**WATERING:** I suggest you water clematis as you would roses. A good rule of thumb is to always water thoroughly and deeply during the hot summer months. The first year the new clematis plant is forming its stems and root structure that will support it throughout its life.

**MULCHING:** I put down fresh mulch in the spring and again in the fall. The mulch should not touch the plant so keep it a few inches away from its base to prevent diseases. I usually apply about a three-inch thick layer of mulch. Mulch helps the soil retain moisture. I prefer using small nuggets of pine bark mulch, but shredded hardwood, cedar, or cypress mulch are also acceptable.

**SUPPORT:** Clematis needs a support to climb on. I have found that if a support is not provided, clematis will either sprawl over the ground or cling to anything nearby; therefore, it is extremely important that one supplies some type of support.

**EXTEND BLOOMING:** Clematis will bloom more often when deadheaded. Many gardeners love the fluffy seedheads of clematis; however, if left on the plant they will keep your plant from producing more flowers.

**TRANSPLANTING:** The best time to move clematis is when they are dormant because during the dormant season it is asleep; therefore, there will be less stress on its root system...January and/or February in Parker County. If you must transplant in warmer seasons, try to pick a cool and overcast day to transplant. **DO NOT** transplant during hot or windy periods. First, have the new hole ready by preparing the new planting site as you would for a new plant. Use a pitchfork to dig the plant out because this will help preserve the roots. Dig out as much of the root ball as possible and carefully transfer it to its new home. If necessary, plant the clematis three to five inches deeper than previously planted to encourage new growth from the root system. Thoroughly water the plant with a solution of Maxicrop Liquified Seaweed; pruning back the uppermost stems by half to

compensate for the loss of roots, then attach the stems to a support. Be sure to find a permanent location for your clematis and leave it there for best blooming results.

**DISEASES & PEST CONTROL OF CLEMATIS:** In my experience the most common diseases that can attack clematis are wilt (stem rot) and powdery mildew.

Clematis wilts periodically, one day clematis will be looking healthy, and then the next day it appears to be wilting or ailing. Again, I've only had this happen a few times, and it's been in the heat of the summer when I've planted a new clematis plant. I immediately cut off all of the diseased parts of the vine carefully and then disinfect my clippers by dipping them in a 10% bleach solution (1 part bleach to 9 parts water) after each cut. Caution should be used with a bleach mixture because bleach can cause permanent discoloration to clothing. When finished, dispose of all the diseased stems in a sealed plastic bag to avoid spreading any potential fungal spores. Several weeks later, the clematis usually bounces back full of vigor with new growth and appears healthy.

Powdery mildew is a fuzzy, grayish-white, powdery substance that coats tender new leaves and stems. I personally believe that powdery mildew is from too much humidity, too much shade, excessive moisture, and heat stress. Powdery mildew can cause deformed flowers and foliage, and may reduce flower production. It is a fungus that thrives in shady locations and areas of high humidity. Treatment of a product that contains Neem oil has been successful for me.

I've read from many clematis resources that pests such as snails, earwigs, aphids, mealy bugs, scale, thrips, whiteflies, and spider mites can bother your clematis. However, I've grown clematis for over a decade in Parker County, and I have not experienced a problem with these pests. I've speculated that maybe my habitual use of Maxicrop Liquified Seaweed might be the reason. I have read that using a solution of either insecticidal soap or a light horticultural oil will control pests. I have experienced minor foliage problems with canker worms that usually appear for a couple of weeks in mid April in Parker County. To control canker worms, spray Bt (*Bacillus Thuringiensis*) on all trees, shrubs, and plants, but be careful to read the label and following directions. A word of caution, be aware that when you spray Bt, you will also kill the beneficial insects, too, plus all caterpillars, even the ones that will become beautiful butterflies.

**PRUNING CLEMATIS:** Some gardeners feel squimish about pruning their clematis, but don't be afraid to prune! Even if you prune too much, your clematis will recover to bloom at a later time. Clematis flowers always appear on the tips of new stems. Clematis often are slow to break dormancy each spring. Be patient and allow it to wake from its winter sleep. There are three categories for pruning, and this is based on when your clematis blooms. The pruning methods are referred to as: #1, #2, or #3. Some refer to the pruning methods as A, B, or C. Then again, some refer to the pruning methods as NO pruning or OPTIONAL pruning, LIGHT pruning, or HARD pruning. I will refer to the pruning methods as Group #1, #2, and #3 for this article. **Don't be concerned with the methods or when your clematis blooms, the important thing to notice is when the leaf buds swell.** So when do you prune your clematis? 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.

**GROUP #1 (NO pruning or pruning OPTIONAL)** The varieties in this group bloom primarily in spring on the previous year's growth. Pruning, if necessary, should be done soon after blooming. As a general rule prune out dead, weak or broken stems annually. As needed, prune to shape or to keep the plant from becoming overgrown. Remember, if you prune a clematis in this group, do it AFTER it blooms. If a clematis from this group is growing on a tree it can be left for several years without much attention except to tidy up. Example: *C. Armandii* 'Snowdrift'.

**GROUP #2 (LIGHT pruning)** This group includes all the early large-flowering hybrids and their double and semi double forms. Left alone and unpruned, they will bear smaller flowers and eventually carry too much dead growth muddled in with the new. Group #2 blooms in early summer. In this group, all first flowering blooms come from last season's ripened stems. In early Spring watch for swelling leafbuds. When it begins to show, cut all dead material off above these swelling buds. Be sure all growth is tied to trellis, etc. at this time. Do not tie too tightly, so growth can begin and not be hampered by tying too tightly which would result in cracking these stems. Examples: 'Asao', 'Franziska Maria', 'H.F. Young', 'Henryi', 'Josephine', 'Multi Blue', 'Nelly Moser', 'Niobe', 'Sunset', 'Miss Bateman', 'Ramona', 'The President', 'Warsaw Nike', 'Will Goodwin', 'Patricia Ann Fretwell', etc.

**GROUP #3 (HARD pruning)** This group includes viticellas and Jackmanii-type hybrids. This group blooms during summer and fall, and it is best to prune the plant back to within 12 inches of the ground when the signs of new growth appear in the spring. This group should be pruned in February or March as new leafbuds begin to show at the bottom of the plant. All dead materials above these buds should be removed at this time. Clean out old or mildewed foliage at this time also. If you are unable to identify which clematis cultivar you have, pruning it by this method is best. Examples: 'Duchess of Albany', 'Ernest Markham', 'Etoile Violette', 'Florida Sieboldii', 'Hagley Hybrid', 'Jackmanii', 'Rosemoor', 'Sweet Autumn', 'Ville de Lyon', etc. I have cut my 'Sweet Autumn' down to as low as 6 inches in February, and it doesn't hurt it in the least. It still performs great in late August through mid September here in Parker County. When one is performing #3 or hard pruning method, make your cut just above a pair of healthy leaf buds. Hard pruning is recommended for clematis varieties that can grow extremely tall. This helps produce a bushier clematis and eliminates containment problems. Pruning in the fall is another option. Prune out damaged or dead wood and lightly prune the portions of the vine that bloomed. This pruning keeps it in shape and keeps it from getting bare legs. On a personal note, I hard prune my 'Sweet Autumn' in the fall. I have found that if I do not prune in the fall, it reseeds everywhere, and I have babies that appear all over my yard in the spring. I learned this the hard way. A few years ago I gave my neighbor one of my extra 'Sweet Autumn' plants. The next year she brought it to my attention that she had 'Sweet Autumn' all over her yard from the plant I gave her. I went over to look, and she was right. I had never had this problem, but I attribute it to

the fall pruning. Most people I conversed with about 'Sweet Autumn' reseeding told me they had never heard of it reseeding, but in Texas, anything is possible, proven by my neighbor's yard. I was really embarrassed that I had given her the plant. Luckily, she didn't get upset with me, and we still remain friends. Since then, I am quick to prune 'Sweet Autumn' in the fall. In addition, I usually try to caution people to research any plant that I give them.

#### **TIDYING TIPS AND PRUNING POINTERS:**

- Use a pair of sharp clippers.
- Always start at the top of the stem and work your way down. You can identify a live stem by cutting off a small piece near its top. A live stem will still be green inside.
- If your clematis is a tangled mess you can't unravel, prune just below the problem area. Spread out the remaining stems and re-attach them to their support structure.
- Remove the old plastic tape that the wholesale nursery used because this is a perfect insect haven! I prefer to use a velcro tape that can be used repeatedly season after season.
- Spray clippers with a mixture of bleach and water after each cut to prevent the spread of fungal diseases.
- Some clematis resources state that after pruning, one should spray the plant with a horticultural oil to kill any overwintering insects and eggs residing on the remaining stems. I have not tried spraying with a horticultural oil, but it does sound like something I might want to experiment with IF I ever have an insect problem. I haven't experienced a problem with insects; therefore, I haven't sprayed with a horticultural oil.

#### **Recommended Websites:**

[www.clematis.hull.ac.uk/](http://www.clematis.hull.ac.uk/)  
[www.donahuesclematis.com](http://www.donahuesclematis.com)  
[www.chalkhillclematis.com](http://www.chalkhillclematis.com)  
American Clematis Society

## **Recommended Clematis** **for Parker County**

By: Grenetta Bledsoe

I have successfully grown the clematis listed below in my yard. My favorites of the ones listed below are 'Ramona', 'Jackmanii', 'Josephine', and 'Henryi'...in that order of preference. In my opinion these are the easiest to grow in Parker County:

1. 'Ramona' (PRONUNCIATION: Ra-mo-nah)
2. 'Jackmanii' (PRONUNCIATION: Jack-man-ee-eye)
3. 'Josephine'
4. *Texensis* Duchess of Albany (PRONUNCIATION: teck-sen-siss)
5. Henryi (PRONUNCIATION: Hen-ree-eye)
6. Nelly Moser (PRONUNCIATION: Mo-zur)

I have anywhere from 1 to 6 clematis plants of the same variety. Even though I continually can't resist purchasing additional clematis, I presently have the following 29 different cultivars of clematis growing in my yard: 'Asao', 'Belle of Woking', 'Dr. Ruppel', 'Duchess of Albany', 'Ernest Markham', 'Etoile Rose', 'Etoile Violette', 'Florida Sieboldii', 'Franziska Maria', 'Henryi', 'H. F. Young', 'Jackmanii', 'Josephine', 'Miss Bateman', 'Multi-Blue', 'Nelly Moser', 'Niobe', 'Patricia Ann Fretwell', 'Proteus', 'Ramona', 'Rosemoor', 'Rouge Cardinal', 'Sieboldii', 'Snow Queen', 'Sunset', 'Sweet Autumn', 'The President', 'Voluteau', and 'Warsaw Nike'.

## Cuttings of the Clematis from the Member's Section of the American Clematis Society

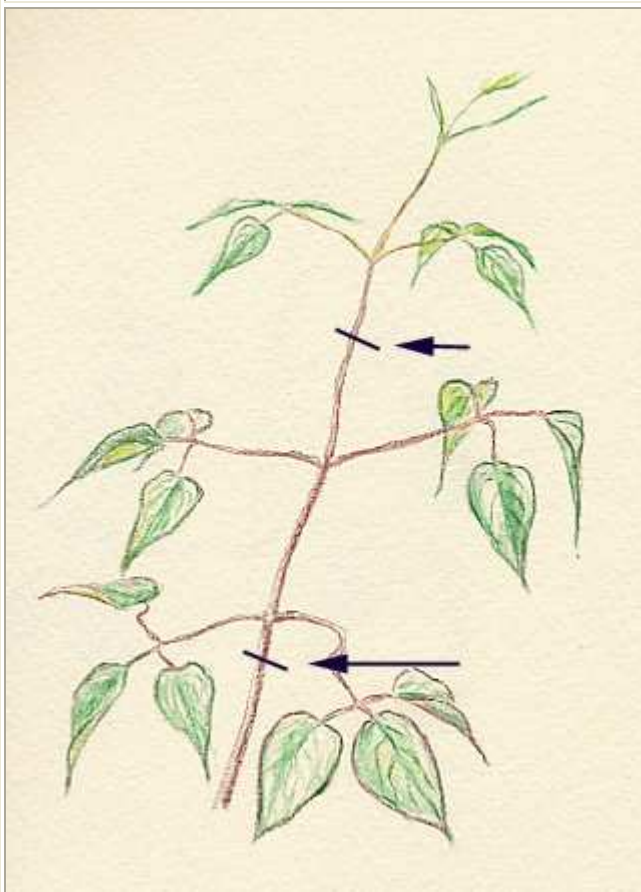
For the propagation of the clematis by cuttings, there are both one-node-method and two-nodes-method.

By one-node-method, one can obtain more cuttings from each stem, so that it is good for mass production of plants.

On the other hand, it is reported that cuttings are more likely to survive in the case of two-nodes-method. If you don't need so many plants, it is advisable to propagate by this method.

Here, I explain the two-nodes-method.

### Step 1 –making a cutting -



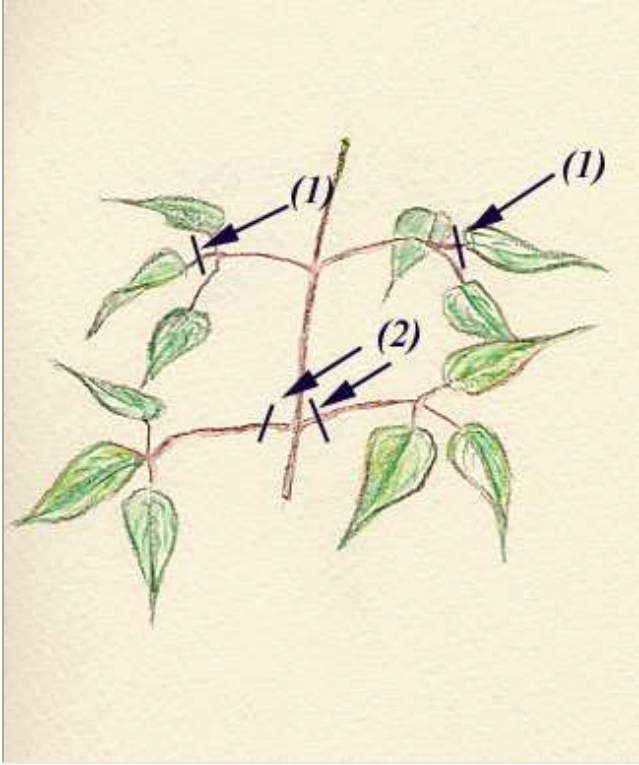
Usually, the cutting should be cut out from this year's healthy stem.

Cut the stem as the cutting comprises two nodes (cut at the positions marked with arrow in the left drawing).

Use a sharp knife or scissors not to crush the organization around the cutting sections.

**Comments:**

## Step 2 -preparation of the cutting-



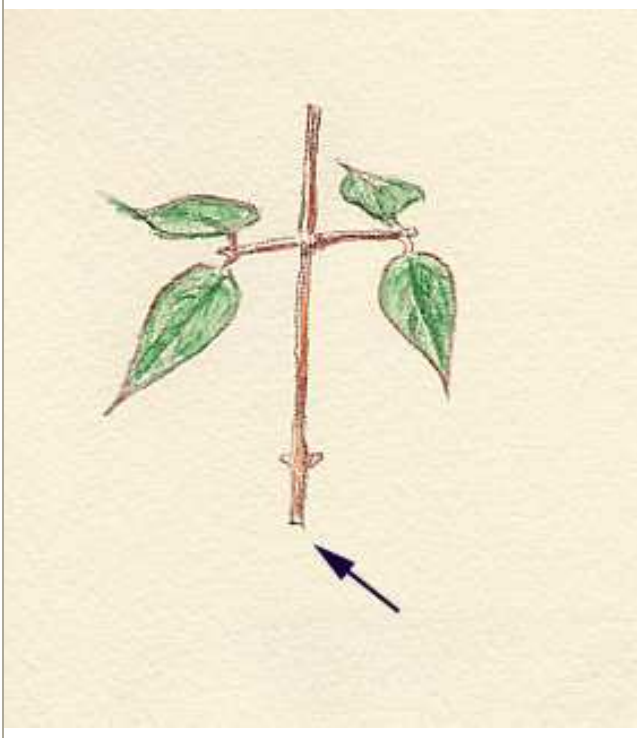
(1) Remove two leaves of upper node to eliminate the amount of evaporation of water.

If the leaves are too large, remove more leaves to keep one or two.

(2) Remove all the leaves of the lower node.

**Comments:**

### Step 3 –completion of the cutting-



Here is a cutting just prepared.

Pay attention not to harm the lower cut section (arrow in the left drawing) nor to make it dirty.

### Step 4 -water absorption-



Prepare a vessel like a glass or a bottle, pour water in it, and immerse the cuttings in it for 1 or 2 hours.

If you immerse at a time different varieties of clematis, make sure to put a name label to each cutting or use different vessel for each variety to avoid the confusion.

## Step 5 –preparation of a pot-

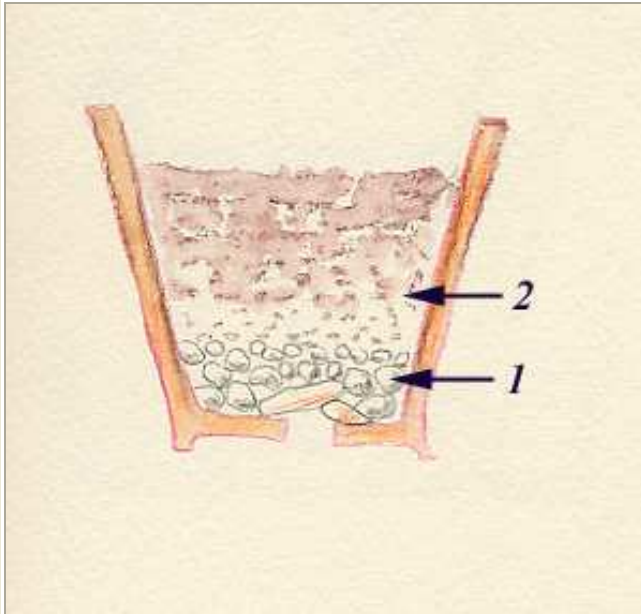


For the cuttings, pots, containers for plants can be used, if they are clean.

They should have the depth so that more than 5 cm of the cuttings is in the soil.

Larger containers are better for keeping the moisture of soil.

## Step 6 -preparation of a planting bed-

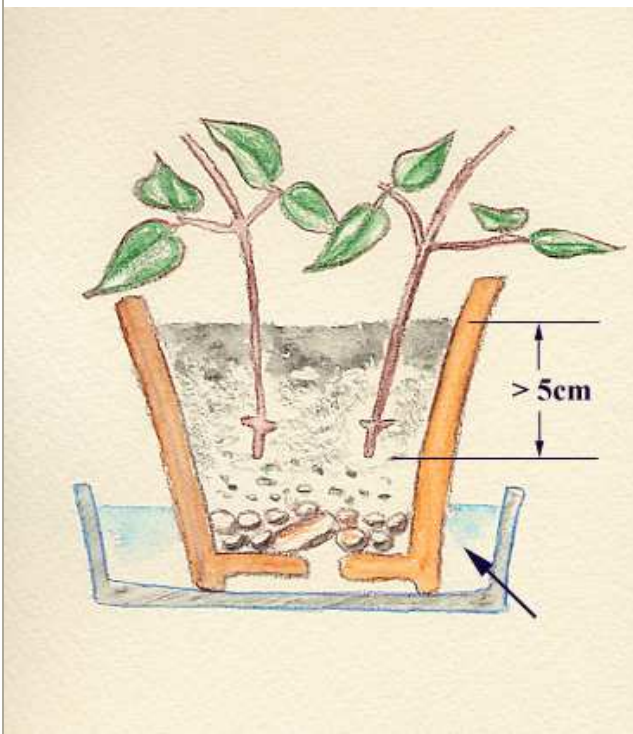


Put pebbles or pumices (1) on the bottom of the container, then fill the fine grits or compost(2).

Each material should be clean, free of pests and diseases

**Comments:**

## Step 7 - inserting the cuttings -



Before inserting, it is advisable to dip the bottom of the cuttings in hormone rooting powder. It will help successful rooting.

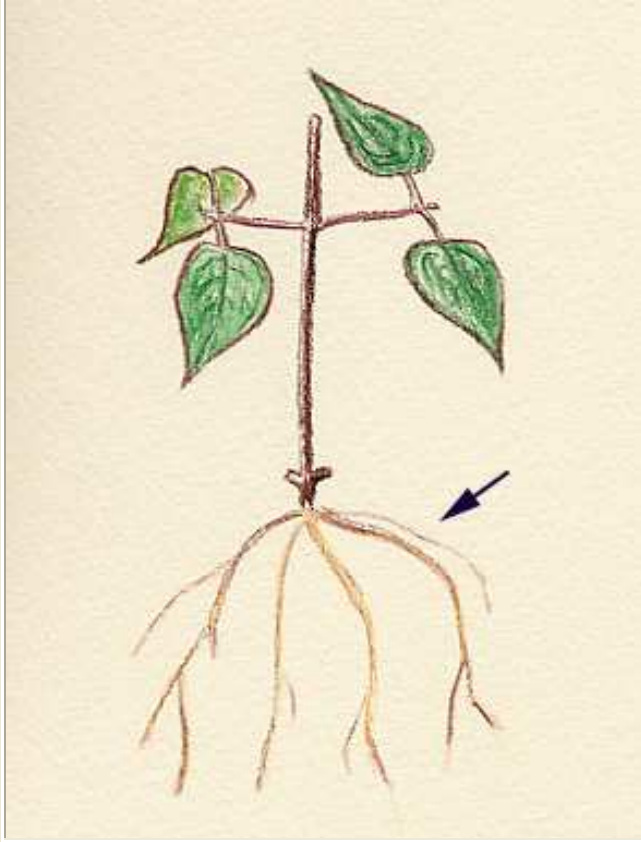
Make a hole in the soil containing sufficient amount of water, and insert the cutting in it.

Make sure to keep the leaves some distance from the soil. (If the leaves contact with it, they easily rot.)

After inserting the cuttings, water them again, and put the container into a water bath (arrow in the left drawing). Change the water frequently not to rot.

## Comments:

## Step 8 – cutting after rooting-



The cuttings root about 2 months after the inserting.

Dig out the plants, paying great attention not to harm the roots, and plant each of them in to an individual pot.