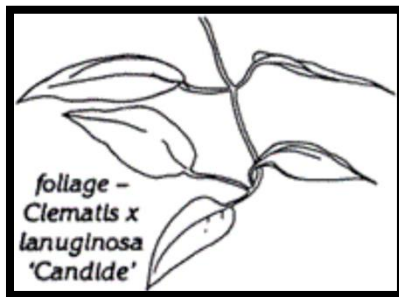


Clematis Pruning and Timing

By Ciscoe Morris

One of the plants that sometimes give pruners a problem is clematis. This is because there are three different kinds of clematis, and each kind needs a different style of pruning.

The key to pruning clematis is bloom time. One type of clematis blooms in summer or fall. Another type blooms only in spring. A third type blooms in spring, followed by another bloom in summer or fall. Often, it's difficult to tell which type you are dealing with. If you don't know, it's probably wiser to wait a year to find out and then prune accordingly.



Summer Bloomers

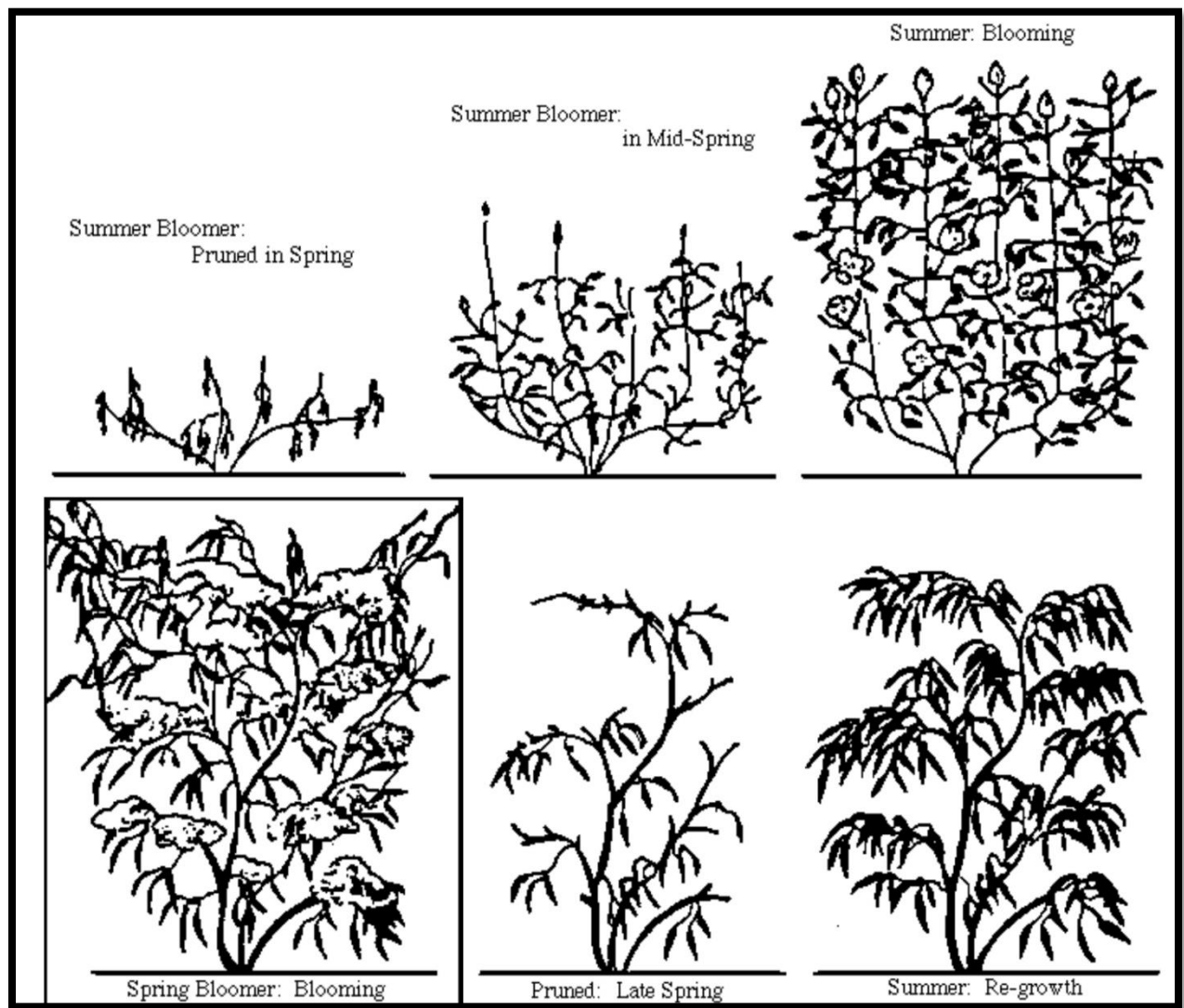
The easiest clematis to prune are those that bloom in summer or fall (bloom after the end of May). The classic summer bloomers are the lawsoniana varieties. The huge blossoms flower on wood produced in the spring. These late bloomers are best pruned to within about 2 feet of the ground every year. The summer and fall bloomers can be pruned in fall, once the vine takes on that dead look, or in early spring before growth begins. I prefer pruning them in fall so I don't have to see that ugly, dead looking foliage all winter long. When planting summer blooming clematis, I usually prune it to within 6 to 12 in. of the ground for the first 2 to 3 years. That promotes low branching for a fuller plant with more flowers.

There is at least one exception to this rule. That is the relatively rare *Clematis maximowicziana*. This plant blooms with small, fragrant, white flowers late in summer and is generally evergreen here in the Pacific Northwest. To preserve its evergreen nature, it should be pruned before growth begins in spring in the style described for *Clematis armandii* below.

Spring Bloomers

The spring blooming clematis include the fragrant *montana* and *armandii*. These bloom only on the previous year's growth. Prune these a month after the bloom fades in spring. These plants quickly resemble rat's nests if they are not kept under control. I prefer to keep these vines thinned out in a style that I refer to as the tracery effect. To achieve this, prune out all but 2 or 3 stems. Allow only as many lateral stems as the trellis can support without looking crowded. Prune all other growth back to the main branches. To prevent *armandii* from becoming bare at the base, pinch low growing branches, and train laterals to cover the base.

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Spring and Summer Bloomers

Clematis that bloom in the spring and summer (or fall) are the most confusing. The China native *lanuginosa* with its attractive 6 in. flower is a good example. These bloom on old wood in spring and new wood in summer or fall. To preserve the old wood that will produce the spring bloom, prune lightly in fall or late winter. Remove only dead wood, and weak, spindly growth. In spring, immediately after the bloom, cut back branches that flowered to the main framework branches. This will promote the new growth that will bloom in fall, and again in spring. The only problem with the spring and fall bloomers is that the need to preserve the old wood for the spring bloom makes it necessary to leave the ugly dead looking foliage on the trellis all winter

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long. I guess a little ugly foliage during the winter is a small price to pay for two displays of spectacular clematis flowers each season.

