



You say *Cle-may-tus*, I say *Cle-mah-tus*!



From the GARDEN

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You know, it doesn't really matter how you say botanical names. The important thing is that you and I understand just what plant it is that we are discussing. In this case, we are discussing a mighty-fine vine — actually, a great number of mighty-fine vines in the genus

Clematis

This genus is found in the plant family Ranunculaceae (don't worry about pronouncing this one!), commonly called the buttercup family. Close relatives in the same family are also popular garden additions such as monkshood (*Aconitum*), columbine (*Aquilegia*), meadow rue (*Thalictrum*), delphinium (*Delphinium*) and prairie crocus (*Pulsatilla*).

In the photo of *Pulsatilla vulgaris* blooms, (**top right**) the relationship to clematis is not obvious, however if you look at the seed head that follows (**middle right**), you cannot mistake the similarity to the seed heads of the clematis.

The word clematis is derived from the Greek *klema*— a branch or shoot, sometimes from a vine. The first introduction of clematis was in the 16th century and, while little is known about the breeding at that time, the species being grown were Britain's only native, *Clematis vitalba*, and species from Europe, *C. viticella*, *C. flammula* and *E. cirrhosa*.

Hybridizing began in earnest in the 1800s and by 1860 the large, flowered hybrids were firmly fixed in the horticulture trade. According to Barry Fretwell in his book *Clematis*, "between 1860 and 1890 more new varieties were raised than at any time in the history of clematis; catalogues of the time list as many as 200 large-flowered hybrids". The use of the vine diminished in the early 1900s but a steady interest in clematis since the 1950s work of Walter Pennell

set the stage for the popularity of the plants today.

My first brush with the genus happened when I was introduced to *Clematis x jackmanii*. It was the one clematis that was readily available and hence, regularly planted.

Introduced by Jackman & Sons of Woking, Surrey in 1858 it proved to be a keeper. Hardy to Zone 4a, it is a late-season bloomer, Group 3 (I'll explain this in a bit) and holds the Royal Horticulture Society Award of Garden Merit after all those passing years. It is a standout deep purple if you get the real thing, but, alas, after all these years you may get *C. x jackmanii* 'Superba' a sport of the original which seems to have infiltrated the trade as have many seedling plants.

I should take a moment now to address the issue of pruning clematis, as it is the single most-asked question whenever I speak about the vines.

The short answer is you can prune them all early in the spring but you may lose bloom on some. So, for those who want to give it a go, you need to know the name of your clematis or when and how it blooms. Clematis are loosely divided into three groups as follows:

GROUP 1

(sometimes called Group A or Early Flowering)

The trick: Little or no pruning