

CLEMATIS PRUNING

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Putting aside the more widely known and used clematis pruning groups, over the years I have developed my own.

Group 1 - Easy option

Prune the clematis which are easiest to get at, i.e. next to a path, in a pot or on a patio. No hassle whatsoever; cut them down to a few inches from the ground. In a perfect world you cut to just above a set of buds, but I can never quite see the buds, so I just guess. Deposit the tops in the bin, put your feet up and have a cup of tea.

Group 2 - More tricky option

When you are ready for more challenging action in the garden, prune clematis which are growing up fences, up walls, near the front of a border, or up a pergola or climbing frame, where you can easily pull off the plant, prune, then put it back. Job done. Admire your work, sit back and have a cup of tea.

Group 3 - The awkward ones

Finally, when all the others are sorted, prune the ones which are difficult to get to, such as those planted under a prickly shrub (it seemed a good idea at the time) or next to, or growing through, a group of shrubs which fight back. My top tip is to prune the shrub first of all, disarming the branches which will stick in you, trip you up, spring back and whack you in the face or generally give you a hard time!

After the fight to reach the clematis to be pruned (unjamming your pruners after you have accidentally cut through their supporting wires), pruning is simple. Most of my clematis are the viticella type, flowering in the summer and therefore require cutting back to a few inches above ground level. The montanas, alpinas and macropetalas I merely give a light trim, just to keep them tidy. This should happen, if needed, immediately after flowering, and sometimes they will reward you with a second flush of flowers.

The large-flowered group are the ones which need more careful handling. They generally flower on last year's growth, so if you were to cut them back to the ground they would take the huff and give little to no flowers. This is to teach you not to be too rough with them. Basically tidy them up in the spring; don't go overboard, just a gentle trim, and remove branches that are old and damaged.

When to prune?

Usually, when a gardening friend tells you that they have just been in their gardens and cut back all their clematis. Failing this, usually February.

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