



Lowcountry Master Gardener Association

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DIVINE VINES

Vines are the neglected stepchildren of gardens. People tend to think that because they don't have a trellis, they can't grow vines. Well, I'm here to tell you that vines are a lot more versatile than just growing on trellises.

Some vines are so determined to live, that they will climb to the top of the tallest tree. I found a yellow flower on the ground in my garden and was puzzled where it came from. I didn't plant it, and I couldn't see anything around showing these flowers....until I looked up. At the top of a pine tree, was a mass of yellow flowers. I followed the vine down the tree to a vine not much bigger than my thumb. It didn't seem possible that this stem could travel so far and flower so prolifically. Its common name is Carolina jessamine. In fact, it's our state flower. Although rambunctious when left on its own, it can be a well behaved garden vine.

Vines suffer from a bad rep. Think of Kudzu, or Asian Wisteria. Both happen to be very pretty and fragrant vines. It would be great if you could keep them in check in your gardens. But you can't, so don't try.

However, there are alternatives. American Wisteria. "Amethyst Falls" is or a new introduction "Blue Moon" are lovely. The flowers are smaller and somewhat less fragrant, but what is more beautiful than a pergola draped in wisteria? It also lends itself to pruning into tree form. It becomes a lovely weeping tree, dripping with racemes of white or lavender flowers. When in bloom, it's a traffic stopper! Only regular pruning will keep in tree form. But it's worth it.

A beautiful Wisteria look-alike is Queen's Wreath, but it's tender and must be wintered inside.

Another alternative to Wisteria is Millettia. Its common name is Evergreen Wisteria. Dark red purple blossoms adorn this glossy green vine. It's hardy here, fragrant, non-invasive and deer resistant! What more can you ask of a plant??

Ever seen a climbing magnolia? That's the common name of *Schisandra chinensis*, a deciduous climber that, on some cultivars, produces brilliant red berries which are edible. They're used for juice and for jellies and jams. The beautiful flowers hang from very long pedicles and stand out from the foliage. Should be used more often. This cultivar, Eastern Prince, is self fertile so does not need another plant to produce fruit.



There are perennial vines galore to choose from. Clematis is probably the most versatile, with hundreds of cultivars. So why is it that we see so few in gardens? Probably because they were planted incorrectly and didn't survive. They are very particular about their growing conditions, and even so, take a long time to establish themselves and become stars. They like cool roots and full sunlight. In our climate, how do we accomplish that? I do it by planting it firstly, in enriched soil with good drainage, then I lay the plant in a trench three or four inches deep, cover the roots and stem with soil, leaving the stem with several leaves above ground, and put a rock on top of the trench, having first laid down



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a couple of inches of mulch. Clematis are like tomatoes in that they will root along their stem. In fact, if you love a particular cultivar, scratch a stem and lay it in a trench you have made near the mother plant, cover it with a rock or brick and in a few months, you'll have a plant you can sever from the mother plant and plant it elsewhere in your garden.

Another reason clematis are rare in the garden is because their pruning instructions are so confusing. Clematis have been classified as Group I, Group II and Group III, and all have different pruning instructions. In my own garden, it doesn't seem to matter. When cleaning up the garden in spring, I'm careful not to prune clematis stems, even tho they may look dead. I just break off the ones that are dried out and desiccated, and never look back. If they're alive, they won't break.

All of the lightweight vines can be allowed to scramble through shrubs without overpowering them. Roses, especially, provide great supports. Both roses and clematis come in many colors, so endless combinations can be made.



One of my most serendipitous garden discoveries was a forgotten purple clematis winding its way through the silver branches of a eucalyptus trees. It turned the non flowering tree into a unique flowering tree. Everyone who saw it wanted to know what kind of tree it was!

Perennial vines are like other perennials in that they bloom only for a few weeks. If you interplant annual vines among perennial ones, the annual ones can take over when the perennial ones have exhausted their bloom and have only foliage.

Robust vines such as Trumpet vine and Cross Vine are great for covering chain link fences, and to hide unsightly views, but they don't really belong in flower beds.

There are two types of climbing jasmine, summer jasmine and winter jasmine. Summer jasmine comes in fragrant white or pink blossoms and is the more vigorous. Winter jasmine's yellow flowers provide color when little else is in bloom. Both will root where stems touch the ground so keep an eye on them. Both benefit from a severe pruning every three or four years.

The selection of vines, particularly annual vines, available in nurseries is slim. I'm not sure why, except that they require a lot of maintenance and space to keep them far enough apart not to get tangled with their neighbors. Vines, by their nature, are prone to reach out and attach themselves to anything in their path.

I've heard that Virginia Creeper is deliberately planted for its fall color, but I surely wouldn't recommend that it be planted here. It, along with smilax and wild blackberry vines, are the scourge of any Lowcountry garden. All are almost impossible to eradicate once they have a foot in your door. Master Gardeners do not generally recommend the use of chemicals, but an exception is often made for glyphosate, or Roundup, because it doesn't pollute the soil. For killing off these marauders, put a few inches of Roundup in a bucket and submerge as much of the offending vine as possible in the liquid, and leave it for a few days. Be sure and anchor the bucket by putting a brick or heavy rock in the bottom of the bucket. If you have pets, cover the bucket as well.



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Another thug is ivy.....even if it is confined to a planter, it will leap out when you're not looking and take over your garden.

But we're here to talk about Divine Vines.....

Some of the most dramatic vines are Mandevilla. These are best as container plants, but they may be planted, pot and all, at the base of trellises or pergolas. Their large tropical flowers, up to 4" in diameter, bloom non stop until killed by the first frost. However, if you wish to overwinter them, bring them inside before the night temperatures go below 50 degrees. Give them as much light as possible, although they might survive the winter in your garage. Don't let them dry out completely, tho. A cup full of water every few weeks should do it.

One of the most exotically beautiful plants in the plant kingdom is hardy here, **Gloriosa rothchildiana**, commonly known as Glory Vine. It is grown from tubers, which can be purchased on line. I've never seen seeds for them,--I suspect that, except for experts, they're difficult to germinate.



A beautiful pink flowered Southern Heritage vine was popular in the early south for screening a porch. **Antigonon, or Coral Vine**. . It's native to Mexico, so it will die down in winter here. It comes back from the roots and can reach 40' in a season. It has lovely inflorescences of pink flowers and makes a great cut flower.

Some people say that **Passion Vine** is invasive. It wouldn't fit the legal and official description of "invasive", which is a non-native that crowds out native habitats.

Passion Vine is a native, and once you have it, it pops up everywhere. We call plants like these "thugs". The species known as Maypop isn't terribly attractive, and it's more vigorous than most cultivars. Unless you have an unused 'south 40', plant a cultivar. All passion vines are hosts to the Gulf Fritillary butterfly. Their caterpillars can defoliate an entire vine in days, but it doesn't seem to matter. It just keeps growing no matter what. If our summers are long, you can expect fruit. You know it's ripe when it falls off the vine. The beautiful deep purple cultivar 'Incense' is so exotically intricate it looks alien. Its fragrance is best enjoyed on the breeze. It's overpowering up close, and definitely not a candidate for the dining room centerpiece.

There are some shrubs that behave as vines, and some vines that behave as shrubs. Ned and Faye Rahn call them "Scramblers". One of these is the **Blue Clock Vine** or **Blue Glory Vine**, surely the most beautiful deep blue vine in the world. Another Scrambler is **Rangoon Creeper**, whose botanical name is "Quisqualis", latin for who?? – what?? Because the taxonomists couldn't decide if it were a shrub or a vine. It's fragrant with red, pink and white flowers on the vine all at the same time. In fact, its Stunning!



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Although it looks delicate, **Asarina scandens**, or Climbing Snapdragon is one tough customer. It works wonderfully well in a pot, but can be planted in the ground in a protected spot. Its tiny flowers do look like snapdragons.....sort of.

Sinecio, or Mexican Flame Vine, has hot, orange flowers all along its 10 to 15 length. It thrives on benign neglect, poor soil and little water. What it really needs is sun, and it isn't fazed by our summer heat. Plant this on a trellis among a stand of Tithonia, or Mexican sunflower, and the area will vibrate with butterfly and bee activity. Breathtaking in full bloom. Blooms from the time the soil warms up in spring until hard frost. And luckily, you can sometimes find it at local nurseries.

There are so many pretty annual vines, the Moon Vine probably being the most well known, followed by the rest of the Morning Glories, known as Ipomoea



There is no excuse for not growing **Morning Glories**. They're easy, colorful and bloom all season. For a 99 cent packet of seeds (and that's only for the first year,--you can collect seeds from your own plants thereafter), you can cover a long fence with beautiful heart shaped foliage and charming flowers. And surely no garden should be without the elegant Moon Flower.

The beautiful blue perennial, Ipomoea indica, or Blue Dawn flower, is as invasive as it is beautiful. My friend and fellow gardener, Jenny Staton, calls it "The Flower That Ate My Garden". I can't deny that it hides my dog run fence, but it has no maximum spread,--it roots everywhere it touches the ground and everywhere it roots is like a brand new plant. It just goes on and on, so beware when you invite this one into your garden. It could follow you into the next world!

Some of the prettiest vines are annuals, and can usually be had only if you grow them yourself. You can generally find seeds for **Cardinal Climber, Hyacinth Bean, Sweet Pea, Blackeyed Susan, Nasturtium, Cypress Vine, Moon Flower**, and other beautiful Morning Glories in kiosks every spring. However, try some of the more unusual ones, such as Climbing Snapdragon, Cup and Saucer Vine, Spanish Flag. Seeds and sometimes plants are available on line.

And of course, we can't forget **Honeysuckle**. The asian species are very invasive and should be avoided. However, our native Lonicera sempervirens cultivars are well behaved and gorgeous. You couldn't ask for a better hummingbird feeder. Try Crimson Cascade and Alabama Crimson. They bloom from spring to fall, are fragrant and deer resistant.

Akebia, or Chocolate Vine's flowers are hidden among the foliage, but smell of chocolate. Each leaf of its unique foliage is divided into 5 leaflets,--a leaf flower. Keep it in a pot as it is very aggressive. Listed on SC's invasive list, but experienced Master Gardeners grow it successfully and responsibly in their gardens. The odd, sausage shaped fruit is edible and is said to taste like custard.

On Kiwi vines, the foliage is the star. It starts out green, but adds white and pink as it matures. If you have two plants, they should pollinate and give fruit, but I've never known anyone who has fruiting vines.

I haven't mentioned climbing roses,--roses need a class of their own,,,,,,and we're going to have one a next year's Lunch and Learn. I just want to say that climbing roses bloom on old wood, so restrict any pruning to the minimum need to maintain shape.



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Lunch and Learn 2013 presentation.