

THE VITICELLA CLEMATIS

Neglected Garden Treasure

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Do all clematis have to wilt? Certainly not. The most showy group of all never wilts. More than that the viticellas give great sweeps of colour in the summer like the montanas do in the spring.

The trouble has been that the Large Flowered clematis, not growing very tall in pots, are at eye level in the nurseries and catch our attention. But what catches the eye in the garden, for their great amount of colour, are the viticellas.

As we despair of the Large Flowered with their wilt so more and more attention is being given here and abroad to the introduction of more and more viticellas. The parent plant came from southern Europe to England in 1569. It proved to be a very vigorous plant. This vigour you find in all the viticella group. These clematis want to grow and they are very hardy.

The viticellas are easy to plant, take off quickly, don't need any fussing, and some colour is given the first year and a massive amount of colour the second year. They come in every colour except yellow and so the choice is large. The blooms can vary in size from small crosses (produced in their thousands) to medium-sized blooms almost as large as the Large Flowered. I am thinking of 'Huldine', 'Ville de Lyon', 'Ernest Markham', and 'Lady Betty Balfour'. While there are some viticellas like 'Hendersonii' or 'Blue Boy' that can grow to only 2m in your border. Some, on the other hand, like 'Polish Spirit' or 'Blue Belle' which can soar to 6m.

One of the delights of this group is the tendency for the flowers to make bells. Some bells open later but some keep the bell always. Examples of the latter are the wild viticella itself, well worth growing. Another example is purple and white 'Elvan'. Violet bells are found in 'Pagoda' and 'Betty Corning' (it has strong fragrance too). Some viticellas have attractive ruffled surfaces like violet 'Prince Charles' and 'Perle d'Azur' and 'Blue Angel', or dark violet 'Emilia Plater' from Poland and 'Kasmu' from Estonia. 'Perle d'Azur' is the world's most popular clematis.

A great favourite is dark blue 'Etoile Violette'; many prefer it to 'Jackmanii'. Other dark

blues are 'Blue Belle' and 'Polish Spirit'. There are two wonderful pinks, light pink 'Margaret Hunt' and dark pink 'Margaret Koster'. The latter is one of the longest blooming flowers in the garden. If you want a white then there is the delicate bloom of 'Little Nell' on a vigorous plant, or the strikingly different bloom of 'Alba Luxurians' with its mixture of green and white. A glorious white is 'Huldine', as attractive behind as in front, many people's favourite clematis. There are reds galore – very vigorous 'Abundance', attractive red and white 'Madame Julia Correvon', colourful rosy 'Ville de Lyon' and very dark 'Royal Velours' and 'Kermesina'. If you want doubles there is very dark, almost black, 'Flora Plena' (syn. 'Mary Rose') and maroon 'Purpura Plena Elegans'. If you want to dance, dance with pink and white 'Minuet' or cherry red and white 'Tango' or violet and white 'Foxtrot'.

I have said enough to whet your appetite, I hope, for this marvellous group. But more will be pouring in soon. I give one example from Estonia, dark violet 'Viola', an example from Poland ruffled 'Emilia Plater', from Holland bright purple 'Walenburg', from Sweden white 'Hagelby White', from New Zealand almost black 'Black Prince', from the Ukraine deep purple 'Negrit Janka', and from the U.K lilac 'Burford Princess'. The countries are all catching the fever of the Viticella Group, the hope of the clematis world.

You must think you may have to pay a price for this glory in problems of planting or pruning or pests. Not at all. To plant is as easy as with any shrub. Make a hole and put it in just like any other shrub. You don't have to plant deep, you don't have to add lime. There is nothing special to do. Like other plants, of course, viticellas need water and nourishment. (Give them rich feeding as they can be very large plants.)

Pruning could not be easier. You cut them down to the ground in early spring. Don't fiddle looking for nodes. Just cut right to the ground. In mild areas you can prune in the autumn and in that way you take the viticellas off the host shrubs in the winter. In cold areas you can prune to 1m in the autumn, bring the remaining stems together with a tie, and hide them away; the remaining stems will protect the crown of your plant in the winter. Then in the early spring you finally prune to the ground.

As for diseases. No wilt. But in wet seasons you may have mildew on a few of the viticellas. Once you see it coming spray at once with a fungicide. It promptly responds.

The viticellas are easy to propagate. If you are skilled in taking cuttings then you will find these much easier than the Large Flowered clematis in taking. But the simplest way of increasing the size of your plant is to bring a long stem down and slip it into the ground alongside your plant. You can do this on both sides. Soon you will have three plants instead of one. You can also layer the stems very easily. In less than a year you

will have one or more extra plants.

You can use viticellas in the garden in a thousand places. They do well on walls, on fences, on link-chain fences, over sheds, up a pole, over a pergola or an arch, or a bower. Try them into small trees. Any viticella other than a white looks lovely in the false pear, *Pyrus salicifolia* 'Pendula'. Any blue viticella is excellent in matching the yellow *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Frisia'. They will climb into conifers, ivy and holly. They are natural companions for climbing roses; try lovely 'Summer Wine' with 'Blue Angel'. You could also use the viticellas clambering over creeping roses; try 'Prince Charles' with any pink creeping rose. Gorgeous!

Try this neglected garden treasure. I promise you that you will be pleased. If clematis are new to you try the Viticella Group first.