

GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

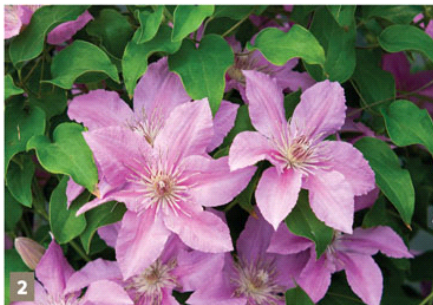
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Collecting Some Clematis

Lowell Halvorson



For many buyers, clematis begins and ends with one familiar name: Jackmanii. If your grandmother had a purple clematis growing up the side of her house, it was probably that one. Customers still ask for it by name and no other variety comes close in annual sales. If you sell one clematis, make it Jackmanii.



1. Baroness Fookes is compact. Its vines grow about half the length of a standard.
2. New for 2027, Bridgewater offers soft pink blooms on vigorous vines.
3. A breeding challenge for clematis are the true reds—they're pretty rare. The best one right now is Elpis.

Offer more than one

Today's clematis market extends into a broad blooming window from spring to fall. Beyond Jackmanii, the next step focuses on spring-blooming varieties, sitting on retail benches in late April and early May, covered in flowers. Then it showcases the possibilities the genus has to offer—a collection of garden stories wrapped in plants.

A simple program would start here:

Jackmanii remains the essential anchor

Betty Corning—The fragrant bell, lightly colored

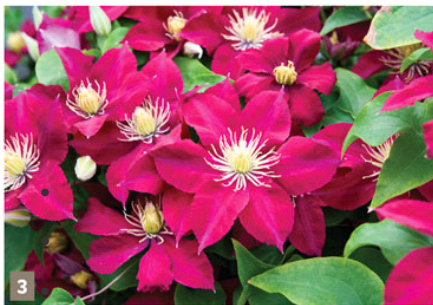
Diamantina—A repeat bloomer and heavily ruffled double

Baroness Fookes—The compact patio vine, purple with magenta

- stripes

A more complete collection would build off of it:

- Silver Moon—A light mauve that loves the shade
- Princess Diana—A purple *C. texensis* with a cream center for garden hotspots
- Guernsey Flute—Pure white



- Crystal Fountain—An unusually fuzzy double in lilac

For order amounts, keep inventory numbers low until you figure out the tastes of the local neighborhoods. Double up on Jackmanii—it will be your No. 1 without question. Ernest Markham (dark magenta) and Comtesse de Bouchaud (rose pink) will be numbers two and three, but clearly behind Jackmanii.

Advantages of a collection

All fanbases have their collector wing and clematis aficionados are particularly strong in number. They're also willing to drive out of their way for a good selection. Tailor your collection around color because most clematis varieties grow well nearly everywhere (add some shade in the Deep South). Take color cues from best-selling pansies, petunias, calibrachos and combos, keeping a finger to the wind—darker, deeper colors tend to sell faster.

That being said, clematis does have breeding trends and they follow a trajectory familiar to most perennial growers.

Extended bloom: Traditional varieties produce one spectacular flush before settling down for the season. Modern cultivars focus on repeat blooming. Here's the breakdown:

- Type I = Blooms on old wood. Do not cut the vines down at the end of the season (*C. montana* Mayleen, light pink).
- Type II = Blooms on both old wood and new wood. This creates a first year blooming effect. In the second year, the color season is extended because the old wood blooms earlier than the new wood (Doctor Ruppel, magenta with pink margins).
- Type III = Dies back to the ground each year, then sprouts from the ground the following year. Clean these vines at the end of the season (*C. viticella* Venosa Violacea, dark purple with light central stripe).

Plant size: Clematis vines usually grow 8- to 12-ft. long. A new crop of cultivars target dwarf varieties, keeping vines 4 to 8 ft. These compacts fit better into today's smaller yards and gardens. Sara Elizabeth (light pink with dark pink anthers) is a good example.

Flower form: Larger-flowered clematis provides the dramatic individual bloom, but many collectors seek out the charm of smaller-flowered species and hybrids. If your goal is a fence, arbor or gazebo draped in color, you want something like the straight species *C. paniculata* (tiny, white, dense and fast growing).

4. Dr. Ruppel blooms on both old wood and new wood.

5. New for 2027, Eliza has soft white washed with lavender.

Color breeding: True red has long been one of clematis' greatest breeding challenges, with many older varieties drifting toward magenta. New introductions like Elpis deliver the best reds in the category to date.

The new stuff: To keep collectors coming back, it's helpful to introduce a few new selections each year. Consider Bridgewater (a vigorous pink variety) or Eliza (soft white flowers washed with lavender). The remarkable Queen's Nurse produces distinctly different flowers on old and new growth, giving gardeners two unique floral displays on the same plant.

Growing out clematis

Production folds into standard perennial practices. Let the soil dry out between irrigations and maintain good air circulation.

Clematis' biggest quirk is planting depth. Set liners deeper than normal to cover the first set of leaves (like a tomato). The extra depth encourages additional shoots from below ground and protects the crown if rabbits, wind or accidental damage destroys the top growth. This advice is true for both liners and the finishing pot in home gardens.

One commercial source for this material is Donahue's Greenhouse (Faribault, Minnesota). If you want a focused list of spring-blooming varieties, go to the Best Picks menu under Shop Clematis on their website. However, their trade pricing lives in the back of their wholesale catalog along with freight and minimum details. Within North America, their material ships as 2.5 in. and 3.5 in. liners or as #1 trade gallons. For operations producing retail sizes, they do offer a snap-on trellis for trade gallons. **GT**



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