

*By Elaine Mills, presenter of Native Vines for the Home Landscape*

The following information is provided as a supplement to answers given to chat box questions during the live presentation.

### General Information

Regarding the **best time to plant vines**, see [“Growing Vines Successfully”](#) in the Gardening How-to Articles series by the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. This post provides details on site basics, planting, and maintaining these plants. Gardeners should check plant labels for information on preferred light and soil moisture and plan to keep their vines well-watered during the first growing season.

As far as **training vines**, gardeners should be aware of growth habit (climbing by stem or leaf tendrils, twining, or clinging) of the species they are growing. See tips for types of support and best materials to use for training vines based on growth habits from these reputable websites: [“Growing Your Garden Vertically,”](#) K-State Research and Extension  
[“Landscaping with Vines,”](#) University of Vermont Extension  
[“Selecting Landscape Plants: Ornamental Vines,”](#) University of Missouri Extension

Certain basic rules apply in the **pruning of vines**:

- If a vine blooms early (before June 1<sup>st</sup>), it’s blooming on “old wood,” vegetative growth on which the flower buds were set in the previous year. It should be pruned shortly after flowering.
- If a vine blooms after June 1<sup>st</sup>, it’s blooming on “new wood,” vegetative growth from the start of the current year. It can be pruned in late winter to very early spring before that growth starts.
- See additional information on [general principles of pruning](#) from University of Maryland Extension and more specific information on the [pruning requirements of common vines](#) from Cornell University Cooperative Extension.

**Growing vines in containers** can add vertical height and make use of limited space in a small garden. They can be used for shade or screen or as specimen plants. Note these tips:

- Best planted in moist, general-purpose planting mix in a fairly large container
- Need support for climbing; insert before planting, firmly anchored, substantial enough to handle weight
- Site according to plant preferences for sun
- Some plants need protection from wind and winter weather

## Additional Information & Answers to Chat Box Questions

- Plants, such as clematis, need to have their roots cool
- Trumpet vine needs very substantial support
- Consider using compact forms of clematis and honeysuckle

See [“Growing Vines in Containers”](#) (includes videos) from the University of Illinois Extension for more details.

Regarding the concept of **growing vines together**, this may be difficult as vines have different growth habits, and some species are stronger and may overwhelm others. Pruning may be a challenge if the shoots intertwine.

In response to a question on allowing **growth of vines in trees**, Dr. Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home* (pp. 276-278) advises against this practice.

- While in principle, native vines can be “good neighbors” in ecosystems, providing insects & fruit, there can be serious problems with woody vines, regardless of their geographical origin.
- All native woody vines in the East grow faster than trees, so the trees end up being unable to photosynthesize as their canopy foliage is smothered. The trees can also be pulled down by the sheer weight of vines.
- A blog from New Mexico State University comments that in addition to competing for light, vines will compete for water, and there is the potential for vines to girdle themselves as they wrap around a tree.

As far as **growth of vines on a house**, Virginia Creeper can be safely grown on stone or brick as its adhesive holdfasts do not harm masonry. The tendrils should be kept away from siding, wood, gutters, and wiring, however.

- North Carolina State Extension raises issues regarding **flammability** of some native vines, suggesting that Virginia Creeper, Cross-vine, Carolina Jessamine, Trumpet Honeysuckle, Dutchman’s Pipe, Passionflower, and Trumpet Creeper are best grown on trellises separate from the house.

Regarding **methods to control growth and spread** of more aggressive vines, one participant advised cutting vines (e.g., honeysuckle) back to the base in early spring.

- University of Wisconsin Extension also advises that vines are very tolerant of pruning. This should be done, of course, following the guidelines above to avoid losing flowers and fruit.
- The Home & Garden Information Center at Clemson advises mowing or weed whacking.
- The regular removal of root suckers, deadheading spent flowers to prevent self-seeding, and planting near concrete are three additional means of controlling spread.

### Categories of Vines

There was interest in knowing which native vines are **evergreen or semi-evergreen**. The latter tend to be evergreen in a mild climate, but deciduous in certain weather conditions such as cold, icy weather. They may shed their foliage for a very short time in late winter, but they will rejuvenate it quickly in the spring.

- Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) – evergreen
- Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) – semi-evergreen
- Cross-vine (*Bignonia capreolata*) – semi-evergreen
- Virgin's-bower (*Clematis virginiana*) – semi- evergreen

The following are **dioecious vines** with separate male and female plants and requiring a male plant for the flowers of the female to be fertilized and produce fruit.

- American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*)
- Common Moonvine (*Menispermum canadense*)
- Virgin's-bower (*Clematis virginiana*) – some have perfect flowers

Vines, in general, are vigorous plants, growing many feet in length and potentially spreading by both root suckers and self-seeding. These vines are **smaller and somewhat easier to control**:

- Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) – 8 to 20' x 6 to 12' (can spread slowly by suckers)
- Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) – 10 to 20' x 3 to 6' (runners)
- American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*) – 10 to 20' x 3 to 6' (self-seeding & suckering)
- Virgin's-bower (*Clematis virginiana*) – 6 to 20' x 3 to 12' (self-seeding & suckering)

Gardeners can take advantage of the vigorous growth of vines and use them as ground cover for **erosion control**

- Virginia Creeper most often considered for this use
- Trumpet Honeysuckle can help control erosion on steep slopes
- Canada Moonvine on woodland slopes

Some participants expressed concern after learning about possible **toxicity** of many of the native vines that were presented. Vines are certainly not the only plants that can be poisonous to humans or pets, if consumed. These plants have been grown safely in many public and private gardens, but for those who are concerned about the safety of children or pets, this list,

based on information from North Carolina State University, indicates the level of possible toxicity of each vine:

### Non-poisonous

- Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*) - none
- Cross-vine (*Bignonia capreolata*) - none
- Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) - none
- Yellow Passionflower (*Passiflora lutea*) - none

### Low severity

- American Bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens*): all parts (cardenolides & alkaloids)
- Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*): flowers & leaves; contact dermatitis

### Medium severity

- Virgin's-bower (*Clematis virginiana*): flowers, leaves, sap; contact dermatitis (protoanemonin)
- American Wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*): seeds (wisterin & lectin)

### High severity

- Carolina Jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*): all parts including seeds (alkaloids)
- Dutchman's Pipe (*Aristolochia macrophylla*): all parts (aristolochic acid – lethal toxin)
- Canada Moonvine (*Menispermum canadense*): flowers, fruits, leaves, roots (alkaloid dauricine – fatal)
- Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*): fruit (oxalic acid – fatal)

### Questions on Specific Vines

There are several possible explanations for **lack of bloom on Cross-vine** (*Bignonia capreolata*):

- Not mature enough, may take several years
- Lack of sunlight
- Too much nitrogen (fertilizer) – putting growth into foliage rather than blooms

There was a question on the possible **effect of pressure-treated lumber** on food plants, such as **American Groundnut** (*Apios americana*), a native perennial vine in the legume family. Please see this helpful report, "[Environmental Soil Issues: Garden Use of Treated Lumber](#)" from PennState Extension, especially the paragraph on potential greater concentration of metals, such as arsenic, in root crops.

Another participant inquired about **Moon Vine** (*Ipomoea alba*). This plant, also known as moonflower or tropical white morning-glory, is native to subtropical regions of North and South America from Florida south. It is a fast-growing, annual, twining vine with fragrant night-blooming flowers. Native Common Moonvine (*Menispermum canadense*) is a perennial vine.

There were several questions on **honeysuckles**:

- **'John Clayton,'** a more compact, yellow-flowered cultivar of Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*), appears to be attractive to hummers, butterflies, and bees.
- **Pink Lemonade** honeysuckle (*Lonicera x heckrottii*, also known as 'Goldflame') is a cross between a European hybrid and native *L. sempervirens*. It is a fast-growing, twining, deciduous vine with fragrant tubular flowers that bloom in spring and intermittently into fall, attracting hummers and butterflies. It grows in full to part-sun in moist soil, reaching 15 feet in height. It can be pruned to a dense, shrub-like shape.
- **Deadheading of Trumpet Honeysuckle** (*Lonicera sempervirens*) is not necessary and will prevent the plant from producing nutritious fruit for birds. This practice may be more desirable to control the self-seeding of more aggressive vines, such as Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*) whose fruit is not consumed by wildlife.

**Dutchman's Pipe** has alternate scientific names: *Aristolochia macrophylla* and *Isotrema macrophyllum*.

I promised to share information about **Honeyvine Milkweed** (*Cynanchum laeve*), a native twining and climbing vine. While it can provide support to Monarch butterflies, it is preferable to plant other native milkweeds in the *Asclepias* genus for that purpose. Once this vine appears in gardens, it is nearly impossible to control without using systemic herbicides. Read a [profile of the plant](#) from Ohio State University.

Concerns about Invasive vines

### Invasive and native bittersweet

- Native *Celastrus scandens* has flowers and fruits at the ends of branches, fewer and larger clusters of fruit, and long, tapered leaves.
- Invasive *Celastrus orbiculatus* has rounded leaves and flowers in leaf axils. It is a prolific fruiter with clusters at many points along the stem.
- Hybrids may occur, making ID more difficult.

### Invasive and native clematis

- Have nearly identical flowers; both are fragrant.
- Native *Clematis virginiana* has three-part leaves with toothed edges and seeds with smooth, thread-like styles.
- Invasive *Clematis terniflora* has opposite leaves with smooth edges and seed with feathery styles.

## Additional Information & Answers to Chat Box Questions

Research has revealed the following information on **Boston Ivy** (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*):

- Flowering plant in grape family native to Korean, Japan, and parts of China. Unrelated to true ivy, also known as grape ivy, Japanese ivy, and Japanese creeper.
- Perennial deciduous vine, plant that covers walls of Ivy League universities
- Need to prune aggressively to keep it in check
- Can damage wood siding, gutters, and roofing
- Regarded as invasive in scattered areas of North America, including parts of New England and Mid-Atlantic
- A better choice than English ivy, but listed as invasive by the City of Alexandria and as a threat by Arlington County, VA

It can be a challenge when **neighbors grow invasive vines**. You cannot seek damages in court for damages caused by invasive plant species. Your actions are limited to “self-help:” removing any roots or branches that come onto your property. See [“What Can I Do About My Neighbor’s Plants Coming Onto My Property?”](#), Home & Garden Information Center, University of Maryland Extension. Suggestions include creating a barrier along the base of the fence line and trying to have a polite conversation about the problem. If a fence is yours, neighbors must ask permission to grow plants on it.

Removal of English Ivy and Other Invasives

See video [“Invasive Plants & Native Alternatives”](#) (Controlling Invasives 1:07:05 & Resources section of handout for recommended control methods)

See also these helpful resources from University of Georgia Cooperative Extension: [“Control troublesome vines in your landscape”](#) (including aggressive native species) [Invasive Plant Species Management – Exotic Woody Vines](#)

Note that invasive species should not be combined with organic waste or compost. They should be bagged and disposed of in the trash. It is possible for these plants to re-root from small sections.