let’s think about a perfect year for a Clematis …

- it’s been planted at the right depth early enough to establish roots before winter sets in… the year before.
- the first thing it is expected to do is to go dormant then awaken following a rest period that is at least 7 weeks long but can be several months in duration.
- or, it is a seedling in nature or the garden that has fallen from a mother plant, germinated and circumstances have allowed it to grow on unnoticed for several seasons… in this case it is interesting to know that clematis, not being tap rooted plants usually push the initial root or radicle out of the seedcoat and it lies horizontally.
- in nature it is rarely alone without plants of it’s own kind.

let’s think about a perfect year for a Clematis …

- mom nature provided leaf debris or other plant material that died back and fell to the ground, giving some protection to the base of the plant.

- this organic material helped keep the base a little dryer and was helpful in early spring as the plant began to push up new shoots, or old stems broke new growth.
- it probably has low, shrubby growth near it, native plants that do not hog water and nutrients like garden annuals and flowering ornamental plants.
- grasses are common or other medium size plants that do not produce huge root competition.
- in nature some plants die, it is a survival of the fittest that includes the best site in terms of many variables including drainage.

let’s think about a perfect year for a Clematis…

- things happen in a garden or in naturalized settings…some of the vines and stems got hit with a late frost or an early browse by critters. the plant takes this in stride, developing strength and adaptability.
- flowering commenced with the plant scrambling or affixing itself depending on it’s type.
- growth was in a natural fashion decided by the plant and what was available to grow on or up through.
- repeated browse allowed the plant to reinitiate some growth because a plant has one mission in life…to flower, set seed and propagate itself.

- how does this translate to best practice and what we do in our own gardens?

here are some of the things we do that do not fit into that ‘ perfect season’

we plant root bound, potted plants without freeing the roots and assessing the condition, size, and type.

we also plant liners whose root’s are too small to establish at the depth that they will need.

we plant them whenever we buy them expecting the plant to overcome seasonal obstacles.

we expect the flowering plant to be able to support the top growth of the potted plant while establishing roots under what might not be optimum conditions.

we use nitrogen, water sucking , non-native plants in close proximity for design purposes with the lonely Clematis!

what best practices can we extract from the perfect year description to increase our success rate?

how can we adapt from nature to the nuture we need to give to have more success and less failure?

base expectations to the time of year planted, type of root and how planted

cut back when planting and after damage

buy and plant 2 or 3 for faster establishment…meaning the floral display you are aiming for and rapid regrowth when damaged.

let leaf debris, or pine needles or even straw you buy protect the base of the plant and do not “clean up” too early in the season

companion plants can be detrimental friends, bases do not need to be shaded



ever heard about Clematis disappearing for years then magically reappearing?

- **some facts about missing Clematis:**
- **rotted roots and dead plant goes missing, it's not coming back…Tug Test**
- **no stems, or failed tug test? …EXCAVATE**
- **WRH….what's that ?**

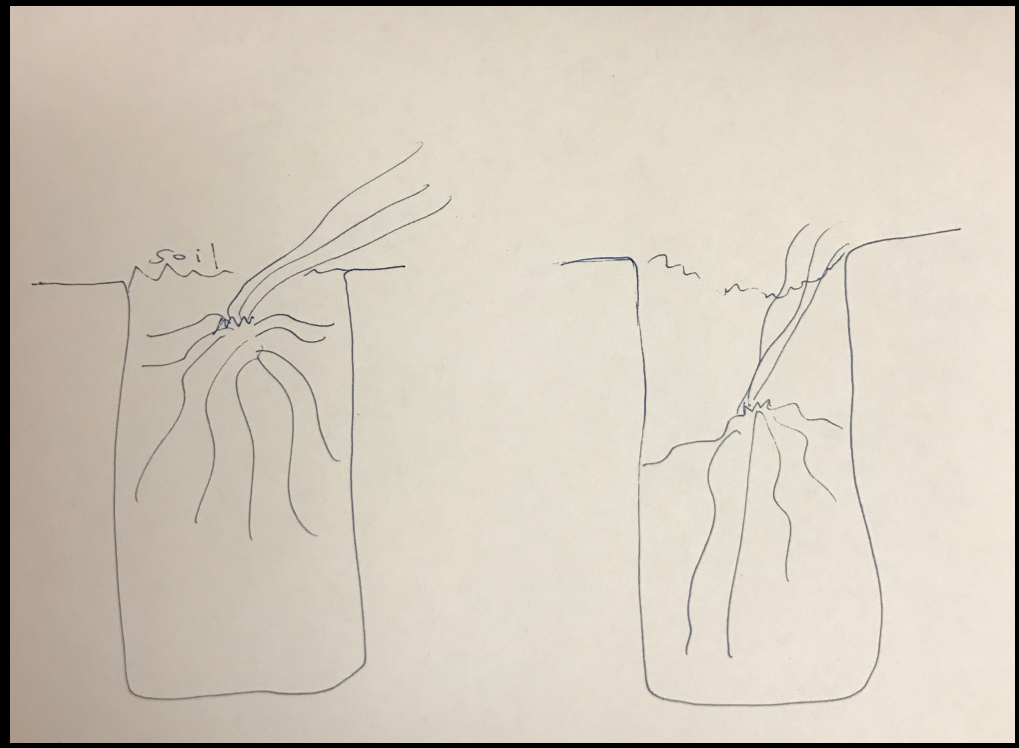
it's spring… where's the plant?????

WRH winter reverse heave

Causes: late fall planting with friable medium not fully settled, sucking the plant downward as medium contracts , absorbs more moisture and settles

Result: Plant can take an extra year to grow to the surface. There will probably NOT be extra crowns, and higher chance of loss of the plant.

Best practice: Excavate and elevate the plant no more than 8 weeks after your other Clematis are up and growing.



fall planting

spring status

how long should it take to establish a Clematis in your garden?

depends on the state of the plant..has it recently broken dormancy?

have you planted it correctly in friable soil ..meaning can you move your fingers thru the soil ?

are you following best practices in regards to watering, mulching etc ?

sleep creep and creep is not necessarily a given



the myth of the “well rooted gallon”

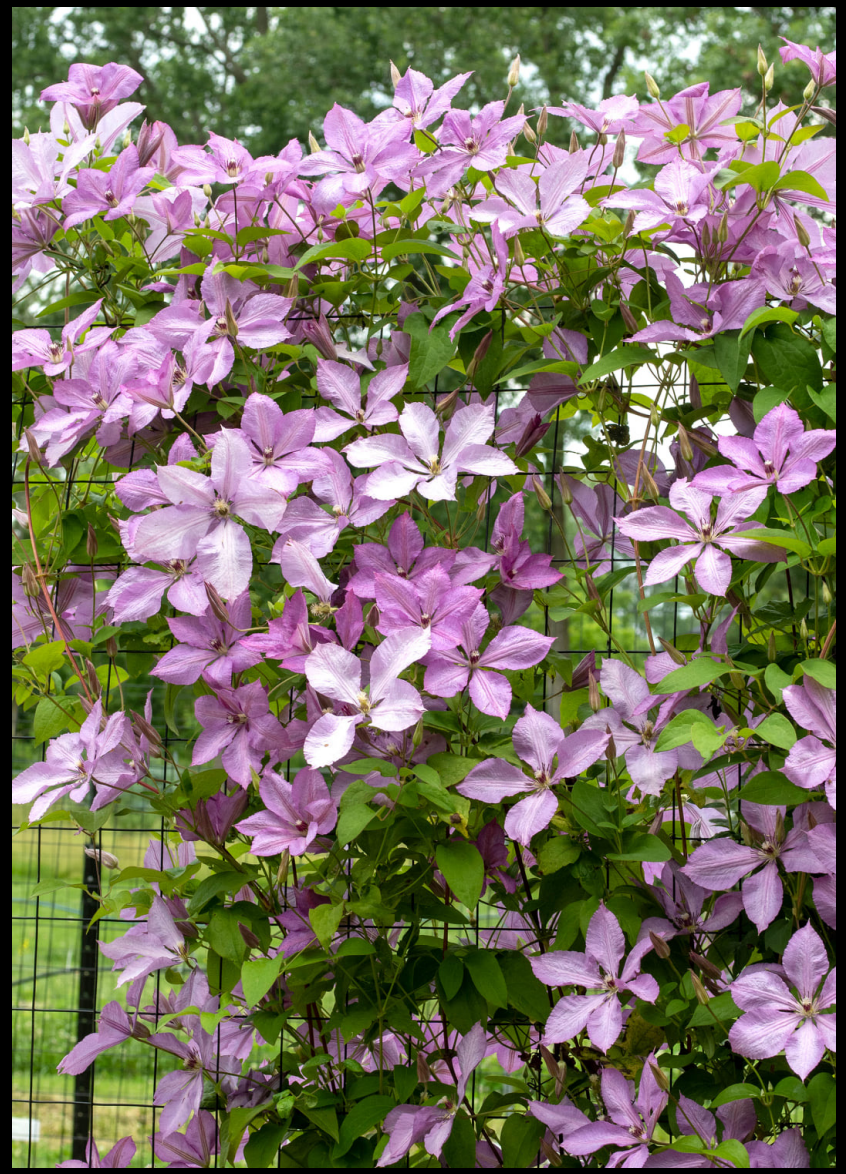
what’s a ready to grow Clematis plant?

a root bound gallon that has not been recently vernalized, or given a dormant period, and is like a thick pot of cold spaghetti is not ready to grow.

Soaking tired root bound plants and teasing the roots apart is needed but sometimes not performed and is just part of the solution.

A ready-to-grow Clematis has had a vernalization period before commencing spring growth, roots are at least 6 inches long and some of them have white tips. They look fresh and desirable…and smell fresh too!







first year plants at a local trial installation



do clematis need “feet in the shade”?

#1 online myth for Clematis ‘solutions ‘

it’s not necessary at all

tall companions can interfere with air flow

in fact, top international breeder’s Clematis displays rarely have anything growing at the base of the Clematis

close companions can use nutrients and moisture intended for the Clematis!

low ground cover plantings can harbor slugs

Clematis like a deep root run, and need adequate water and nutrients…not surface shading

a well-known Clematis breeder in Poland standing nest to rows of trial plants!



where does this myth come from?

companions can hide unsightly lower leaves on Clematis

GROOM THEM OFF OR LOOK UP, NOT DOWN



lower leaf issues

low hedges and companion plants can mask lower leaf issues such as dehydration or bacterial bounce from bare soil, but I prefer an open bottom for the most part.

adequate hydration can help plant bottoms look healthy

but sometimes brown off is just the plant is discarding lower foliage because it does not need it.

best practice for moving Clematis

- A dispute with a neighbor demanded 15 large clematis on a property line be immediately relocated.
- It was August. I was in my third year of gardening and I was terrified.
- Outcome: the plants did better than ever in new situations with better soil.
- Now I transplant older plants, problem plants or when redesigning at any time of the year…as long as I can take care of them after the move.
- It’s ok if some root pruning happens when you excavate the plant.



the myths compound…they need a specific soil pH…MYTH

- **Clematis are actually very adaptable to most garden soils and pH**
- **sure soil with a little lower, more acidic pH, can facilitate nutrient uptake and help better coloring of flowers….but it is not necessary**
- **more important than pH is a planting site that drains freely**
- **more important than pH is that the medium be friable, allowing the roots to move and grow freely and the blend between amended medium and native soil is not abrupt**

many myths about clay soil …

- true, that clay is not friable or easy for roots to move through…

- but it does not dry out fast and has many nutrients…
- if clay can be amended, Clematis do really well in this native soil

- I treat my clay soil like a pot around the planting hole, that is filled with a soil-less, friable amended planting medium and have wonderful results

work with your native soil ,not against it! when it can not be chopped and blended with other materials just do not use it ! (if is too stiff to facilitate root growth)

think berms from your refuse soil

the myths are legendary… they only bloom once

- deadhead smaller plants
- trim your Clematis when the blooms wane (still in flower), fertilize and wait for more
- Clematis have a long bloom span with just a modicum of encouragement
- late season hydration is a common garden issue that shortens the bloom span

- **Clematis are very remontant**



Clematis rebloom is outstanding









another myth…full sun

- **the lighter the clematis flower the more it appreciates a little shade**
- **the brighter the color the more sun it appreciates**







still in love with Clematis, decades later