

Lyndy Broder (shown below with her dog, Lazlo) loves to surround herself with clematis vines, such as this profusion of *Clematis montana* var. *grandiflora* growing at the entrance to her garden.



natural selection

Two hundred flowering clematis vines take center stage at a garden in Stockbridge, Georgia.

BY HILDA J. BRUCKER

“My favorite flower is the clematis,” Lyndy Broder tells me, and I lift my eyebrows at her statement. I have never heard anyone say this before, not through all the years I’ve been a gardener myself. Roses, lilies, orchids, tulips—these are the flowers that inspire madness among human kind and have done so for centuries. But clematis? The average Southern garden

sports maybe one or two vines at most—usually summer-blooming varieties that throw out a mere handful of blossoms over the course of a growing season. Clematis seems to be an afterthought, not a focal point, in most gardens I’ve seen.

But in Broder’s garden clematis strut their stuff in the lime-light. At last count she had about 200 of them, all thriving, all



One of Lyndy Broder's favorite ways to grow clematis is against trees. Here, the brilliant star-shaped flowers of a clematis 'Balyk' provide lively accents to the trunk of a redbud.

remarkably different. Some are dangling little bells that enchant; others are vivid, five-inch stars that awe. It turns out that not only is the clematis a flower of many faces, it's a flower for many seasons—the early-bloomers peak for Broder in April and the show continues until fall. In fact, it's not unusual for clematis to be in flower here as late as December. "I find that probably two-thirds of my early cultivars bloom again in the fall," she says. "In a protected spot, the buds can weather a light frost."

Yet it wasn't this remarkable diversity that started Broder collecting—it was the blues. One of the least common colors among flowers, blue has always been Broder's favorite. "Clematis come in such a wide range of shades of blue that I began searching them out, back when there weren't many varieties on the market," she explains. As she continued her quest for azure petals, something unexpected happened: Clematis vines became the core element of her garden.

Cultivated for centuries in Asia and

Europe, clematis began turning the heads of serious gardeners in the United States only relatively recently. Most familiar are the ubiquitous "mailbox" types, hybrids like 'Henryi' and 'Jackmanii' that were bred for huge flowers and introduced by European nurserymen in the mid-1800s.

Broder laments the fact that these remain the standard fare at Southern nurseries even though they don't perform spectacularly well here—and she believes this has kept the clematis from becoming a favored flower in the South. "We have to encourage the nursery trade to carry other types," she emphasizes, "and we have to get the word out to gardeners." When asked to make a presentation to groups of gardeners, such as the Georgia Perennial Plant Association, Broder recommends hybrids of the smaller-flowered but more vigorous *Clematis texensis* (a Southwestern native) and *C. viticella* (of Mediterranean origin).

Strangely enough, one of the high points in clematis history was the collapse of communism. Many of Broder's favorite clematis were bred by Brother Stefan Franczak, a Polish monk now in his mid-80s who toiled for decades, producing clematis considered outstanding in their beauty and hardiness—and, until recently, cloaked from the rest of the world by a government that allowed no contact with the West. "These were all hidden behind the Iron Curtain for years," says Broder, pointing out cultivars like the brilliant purple 'Polish Spirit' and the reddish-violet 'Westerplatte' in her garden. She hopes to acquire all of the 20 or so varieties of Brother Stefan's that are now widely available.

Broder is so enamored with Brother Stefan's work that last year she traveled to Warsaw to meet him, one of only two Americans to participate in an excursion organized by the International Clematis

Buyer's Guide

Lyndy Broder mainly shops for clematis by mail order, to get the widest selection possible. Here are a few sources worth looking into.

Heronswood Nursery

7530 NE 288th Street
Kingston, WA 98346
360-297-4172
www.heronswood.com
They offer a selection of 40 to 60 varieties of clematis each year.

Completely Clematis

217 Argilla Road
Ipswich, MA 01938
978-356-3197
www.clematisnursery.com
It has literally hundreds of varieties and color pictures of each type.

Joy Creek Nursery

20300 NW Watson Road
Scappoose, OR 97056
503-543-7474
www.joycreek.com
Over 200 varieties of clematis on the Web site, but only some include photographs.

Chalk Hill Clematis

11720 Chalk Hill Road
Healdsburg, GA 95448
707-433-8416
www.chalkhillclematis.com
World's largest grower of clematis.
Sells rare varieties most nurseries do not.

In Her Garden

Lyndy Broder has more than 200 thriving clematis vines, of all different shapes and sizes. Here are some of her favorites based on five categories:

TYPE OF CLEMATIS	LYNDY BRODER'S PICK	WHAT MAKES IT SO SPECIAL
 <p>Small-Flowered</p>	<p><i>Clematis montana</i> var. <i>grandiflora</i> Others that grow well here: 'Triterinata Rubromarginata' 'Purpurea Plena Elegans' 'Armandii'</p>	<p>Unlike the hybrids, which have been bred for large flowers, most of the natural species of clematis have an abundance of small blooms.</p>
 <p>Star-Shaped Flowers</p>	<p>'Baltyk' Others that grow well here: 'Westerplatte' 'General Sikorski' 'Henryi'</p>	<p>One of Brother Stefan's introductions. Most of the early blooming, large flowering clematis feature a classic star shape, though the number of petals varies.</p>
 <p>Double Flowers</p>	<p>'Belle of Working' Others that grow well here: 'Duchess of Edinburgh' 'Blue Light' 'Proteus'</p>	<p>Extra layers of petals give the doubles a frilly, rose- or peony-like appearance.</p>
 <p>Tulip-Shaped Flowers</p>	<p>'Duchess of Albany' Others that grow well here: 'Lady Bird Johnson' 'Sir Trevor Lawrence' 'Gravetye Beauty'</p>	<p>Upright, tubular blossoms with recurved tips give some clematis a distinctly tulip-shaped blossom. This selection is a hybrid of the species <i>C. texensis</i> and is especially vigorous.</p>
 <p>Bell-Shaped Flowers</p>	<p>'Rooguchi' Others that grow well here: 'Betty Corning' 'Pagoda' 'Pangbourne Pink'</p>	<p>One of the many cultivars of the species <i>C. integrifolia</i>. Not only do many of these feature nodding, bell-shaped blossoms, the <i>integrifolias</i> are shrubby—not climbing—plants.</p>

Society. "He was the main reason I went on the trip," she remembers. "As soon as I saw his garden was on the tour itinerary, I mailed in my check." While in Poland, Broder also visited one of the largest wholesale growers of clematis in the world, and hiked for four hours through the mountains bordering Slovakia, looking for specimens of the native *Clematis alpina*. ("We saw one!" she says triumphantly.)

Though very much a collector at heart, Broder is also a master at the art of display. Instead of competing with each other, individual clematis specimens are set off to perfection against thoughtfully chosen companion plantings. "Our property is large enough that everything doesn't have to be all gobbled together," explains Broder, who designed nearly every

area of her three-acre garden herself. While some of her vines bask on fence posts and arbors, many more grow on woody plants like dogwood and viburnum. In some cases the companions bloom together (a duet of blue clematis and blushing pink roses sharing a trellis); other times they perform solo (masses of white *Clematis montana* var. *grandiflora* blossoms dripping from a crepe myrtle that hasn't yet leafed out). In fact, most of Broder's perennials—iris, dianthus, peonies—have been selected in cool shades of pink and lavender that play a soft accompaniment to the more vivid blues and violets of the clematis. In this garden, the genus *Clematis* is clearly enjoying its 15 minutes of fame; if Broder has her way, these flowering vines will become a time-honored tradition in the South. ■ See Resources