

Understanding and Using Vines

By Luis Llenza

Vines present an interesting variation in plant form because they climb, and therefore require some type of support. Many have attractive foliage and colorful flowers. Use them to camouflage a fence, create a colorful arbor or decorate garden accents such as trellises. Vines can provide shelter or shade, soften a harsh wall or cover up an unsightly shed or gas tank. There are three basic types of vines: clingers, winders and twiners.

Clinging vines grasp rough surfaces with rootlets to cover solid upright surfaces such as trees, fences, and walls. Do not use them on wood, since they increase the likelihood of decay, or on masonry, as they can loosen mortar between bricks. For a lush tropical look, select one of these to climb a tree or cover an unsightly stump:

- Golden Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*)
- Heart Leaf Philodendron (*Philodendron scandens*)
- Buckshot Plant (*Monstera obliqua*).

Winding vines climb by means of tendrils and are great for arbors and trellises where lattice, wire mesh or other horizontal supports need to be covered. Try these varieties:

- Coral Vine, (*Antigonon leptopus*), a pink flowered and profuse bloomer.
- Sarita (*Bignonia magnifica*), a highly ornamental vine with rose-purple flowers.
- Red Passion Flower (*Passiflora coccinea*), scarlet red flowers on rusty-haired stems.
- Showy Combretum (*Combretum grandiflorum*), a vigorous, woody climber whose orange-red flowers are translucent and look like sparklers.
- Flame Vine (*Pyrostegia venusta*) with spectacular orange flowers dense with foliage.

Twining vines require tying, hooks or other mechanical means of attachment to a support, at least until they are established. They climb by encircling upright vertical supports and are often used on poles, wires or lattice structures. Twining vines include:

- Mandevillea (*Mandevillea boliviensis*), its showy white flower, often used to soften harsh structural lines.
- Rangoon creeper (*Quisqualis indica*), a great vine for shady areas with its white, pink and dark pink-striped flowers.
- Queen's Wreath (*Petrea volubilis*), a woody vine with beautiful sprays of lavender flowers highly favored by butterflies.
- Confederate Jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*), often used for its fragrance.
- Bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea* spp.), known for its intense color and thorns.
- Horsfall Morning Glory (*Ipomoea horsfalliae*), my new favorite with showy purple-pink clustered flowers.

Placing the right plant in the right place applies to vines. Keep them flowering by planting in full sun. Place them where they can't grab anything but their intended structure.