

Ornamental Vines for New Mexico

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Vines climb, trail, or creep. To remain erect, they need some support other than their own stems. In home landscaping, such plants can be both decorative and functional. When skillfully used, they contribute much to the beauty and enjoyment of a garden area.

Some vines are grown primarily for their profuse or fragrant bloom, for their colorful foliage or fruits, or their persistent foliage. Some vines, such as grapes, produce edible fruits. Most vines that are useful in landscape design are perennial, but a number of annual species, such as morning glory and scarlet runner bean, serve a valuable purpose when rapid and profuse growth is required.

Major Uses of Vines

In the landscape, vines are used to:

- cover arbors, pergolas, patios and similar structures to provide shade and privacy.
- cover fences and masonry walls, creating geometric designs, softening the lines or breaking the monotony of long stretches of barriers.
- screen undesirable or objectionable views from within the garden area.
- provide privacy for the outdoor living area, which serves the same function as a shrub border or hedge but requires less space.
- provide indoor temperature control, a feature of considerable importance in the desert regions of the Southwest. A species that forms a dense growth of foliage on a south or west wall of a building reduces the interior temperature in the summer by deflecting the sun's direct rays.
- provide a ground cover on slopes and in shady areas where it is difficult to maintain turf.

Climbing Plants

There are three distinct types of climbing plants. One type climbs and obtains support by means of tendrils, which are slender, modified leaves that will wrap around almost any support. The grape, sweetpea, and porcelain vines are examples.

A second type is the clinging vine, which climbs by means of adhesive discs or aerial roots that grow along the stems. This type of vine will cling rather tenaciously to wood, plastered, brick, or cinder block walls. The Virginia creeper or woodbine climbs by means of adhesive discs, while the well-known English ivy produces aerial roots along the stems.

The third type of vine climbs by twining stems around a supporting structure. Some species twine themselves from right to left, while others grow in the opposite direction. These vines require substantial support, whether it's made of wood, wire or metal.

Properly selected and well-established vines generally require little maintenance. Slow-growing vines are best adapted for use on walls and fences.

Most vines need occasional pruning to train them into the required shape or form and to keep them within the desired boundaries. The more aggressive and vigorous types, such as honeysuckle, trumpet creeper and wisteria, must be pruned frequently to thin out old growth and to stimulate new growth and flowering. Vines of this type, if unattended, soon become thick, matted, and unattractive.

In selecting vines to plant, choose those that can thrive in the site's soil, light, temperature.

Plant Species and Their Use

The following plant species, listed in alphabetical order by scientific name, are representative of the many vines that can be grown successfully in New Mexico. Specific environmental requirements are suggested, along the descriptive features of each species.

***Ampelopsis brevipedunculata elegans*, Porcelain Ampelopsis.** This deciduous vine has a wide range of adaptability. It is hardy and grows aggressively, climbing by means of tendrils, so that it requires durable support. The young leaves are tinted an attractive pink and become white and variegated greenish white as they mature. Shiny, bright blue berries develop in the early fall. The vine grows best in full sun but will tolerate partial shade. Because of its vigorous growth, rather severe annual pruning in the early spring is required. Porcelain vine is useful for screening, pergola cover or on cinder block walls in any exposure except north.

***Aristolochia durior*, Dutchman's Pipe.** This garden favorite has been grown for many years throughout most of the United States. As the common name suggests, the flowers, while small, resemble a curved-stemmed pipe. The vine grows vigorously and has very large, dark green leaves. This deciduous species climbs by twining its stems around objects, so it requires a ridged supporting structure. Dutchman's pipe is hardy in all but the higher elevations of New Mexico. It is a fine species for screening or for covering pergolas and trellises to produce deep shade.

***Campsis radicans*, Trumpet Vine.** A vigorous, fast-growing deciduous plant, trumpet vine is hardy in all areas of the state. Large, attractive, orange-red flowers appear during the summer. It will grow equally well in sun or partial shade but usually produces more flowers in full sun. Because of its heavy shrublike growth, it should be pruned and thinned out annually to reduce its weight and to keep it within the desired bounds. Trumpet vine will cling to wood or masonry walls, but it usually requires additional support to hold the heavy weight of the vines and foliage. It can be used on well-constructed wire fences and on rock or cinder block walls.

***Cissus incisa*, Treebine Ivy.** Although attractive, this semievergreen vine is of marginal use in New Mexico because it lacks winter hardiness. If the top is killed back, new shoots will grow from underground tubers. This species climbs by means of tendrils, so wire or trellis support is required. Small, green, inconspicuous flowers followed by blue-black, grapelike fruits. It will grow in shady areas but thrives in full sun. Treebine ivy is useful for screening in protected planter boxes or for indoor use as a pot plant grown on a totem pole. The foliage has an unpleasant odor if crushed or bruised.

***Clematis* spp., Clematis.** This genus, with numer-

ous species and hybrids, is an old-time favorite among gardeners. Of the many species of clematis, some are native to the United States, and two, *C. drummondii* (*Drummond clematis* and *C. ligusticifolia* (western virginsbower), are indigenous to New Mexico. Drummond clematis is found among shrubs at elevations up to 4,000 feet. Western virginsbower has a wider range of adaptability and is found commonly along streams and irrigation ditches at elevations from 3,000 to 8,000 feet. Drummond clematis has smaller leaves but larger plumose fruits than western virginsbower.

Both forms are deciduous, climb by twining leaf petioles, and will reach 20 feet in height if given support. White flowers appear in June and are followed by attractive, silky, plumose fruiting structures. Both species will grow in partial shade but best results are achieved when the top growth is in full sun with the roots in a shady area. Clematis are excellent vines for screening or lattice cover.

***Clematis paniculata*, Sweet Autumn Clematis.**

A hardy, semievergreen form, this clematis produces small, white, fragrant flowers in late summer. Silvery, plumose fruiting structures appear during the fall and early winter. Because the flowers are borne on the current season's growth, plants must be cut to ground level each winter without a reduction in floral production. The species is useful in any situation where a vine is desired. Jackman clematis, *Clematis jackmani*, has large, attractive flowers that appear in early summer. Several varieties with flower colors ranging from light blue to purple are available.

***Euonymus fortunei* (*E. radicans*), Common Wintercreeper.** This hardy evergreen vine climbs by means of aerial roots that grow from the stems. Its chief value lies in its evergreen foliage. The vines will cling to tree trunks and walls with rough surfaces, growing equally well in sun or shade. This species also is useful as a ground cover on banks and steep slopes. There are numerous varieties of *E. fortunei* with variations in leaf size, foliage color, leaf persistence and growth characteristics.

***Ficus pumila* (*F. repens*), Creeping Fig.** This is a most unusual fig species, because of its vinelike growth and climbing characteristics. The young vine forms small, heart-shaped leaves, but on the mature vines foliage is larger and more ovate. Creeping fig is not a hardy vine and is deciduous even in southern New Mexico. Winter injury of leaves and young growth frequently occurs unless it is planted in a

well-protected area. The vine makes a good wall cover if planted in a north or shady exposure. Occasional pruning stimulates more vigorous growth and prevents shagginess.

***Gelsemium sempervirens*, Carolina Jessamine.**

A shrubby, evergreen vine of moderate growth, jessamine climbs by twining its stem around the supporting structure. Fragrant, tubular, yellow flowers form in leaf axils and in clusters during the early spring. To prevent a matted, top-heavy growth, annual pruning after flowering is recommended. The vine is excellent for early spring bloom in southern New Mexico. It must have a trellis or some other supporting structure.

***Hedera helix*, English Ivy.** Perhaps one of the best and most widely grown of the evergreen vines, this species is at its best when planted in a northern exposure or a shady location. A year or more may be required for plants to become fully established and begin climbing. English ivy is suitable for use on tree trunks or masonry walls, forming thick heavy foliage cover on these surfaces. Several varieties and forms are available. *H. canariensis*, Algerian ivy, is a large-leaf form with greater sun tolerance but less winter hardiness. *H. helix* 'Hahnii', Hahn's ivy, is small-leaved with dense foliage. It is especially valuable for ground cover use. A variegated form of this species also is available. The Baltic selections of ivy are among the hardiest of this group.

***Jasminum mesnyi*, Primrose Jasmine.** This plant is a viney shrub with grows moderately. Because of its shrubby tendencies, it will form a mound about 4 feet high with a 6-foot spread, if it is not pruned and trained. The foliage is semievergreen with light green glossy leaves during the growing season. Yellow semidouble flowers 1.5 inches in diameter appear in late March to early April in southern New Mexico. Primrose jasmine is not hardy and may require protection during the coldest winter months. While the top may freeze back, strong vigorous regrowth will arise from the crown, making it one of the best of the jasmines in areas where it survives the winter. The plant is useful for a low-growing hedge when unpruned, but it may be trained on a trellis or similar structure when used as a vine. It thrives in either full sun or in partial shade, if it receives morning sun.

***Lonicera japonica halliana*, Hall's Japanese Honeysuckle.** The vinelike honeysuckle has long been a favorite in American gardens. It is a hardy vine, evergreen in most winters in southern New Mexico and deciduous in the colder areas of the state. The newly

formed white flowers change to yellow with age and have a very pleasant, sweet fragrance. Honeysuckle grows vigorously in either sun or partial shade. Annual pruning and thinning of older growth is necessary to prevent the vine from becoming thick, matted and unattractive and to stimulate new flowering wood. This versatile vine climbs by twining its stems around the supporting structure and is a favorite plant for trellis, arbor or pergola use. It is frequently used as a ground cover without support. *L. japonica purpurea*, purple Japanese honeysuckle, is a deciduous form, often used as a ground cover, with yellow flowers and leaves tinged purple or coral red.

***Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (*Ampelopsis quinquefolia*), Virginia Creeper, Woodbine.**

Another old-time favorite native to many areas of the United States, Virginia creeper is a strong-growing, deciduous vine that clings to walls, trees and other structures by means of tendrils with adhesive discs. It is very hardy and grows well in all areas of New Mexico. Its foliage is a light green during the growing season and changes to various intensities of red, depending upon exposure and temperature in the fall. The foliage is not as thick and dense as English ivy, but the vine grows rapidly in either full sun or partial shade. It is, however, very susceptible to mildew when planted in the shade. A subspecies, *P. quinquefolia engelmanni*, has smaller leaves and denser foliage. Another closely related species *P. tricuspidata*, Boston ivy, is similar to Virginia creeper but has denser foliage. One or more varieties with smaller leaves than the original are available.

***Periploca graeca*, Silkvine.** This is a deciduous, semi-hardy, perennial vine that climbs by twining its stems around a supporting structure. It grows rapidly to a height of about 40 feet. The leaves are a dark, glossy green, ranging from 1 to 4 inches in length. Flowers with greenish yellow margins and purplish centers are borne during the summer. Silkvine grows equally well in full sun or partial shade. Annual, rather severe pruning is required each spring for best results. The plant is effective for screening or for use on walls, trellises and lattice structures.

***Petrea volubiles*, Coral Vine, Queen's Wreath.** This attractive vine bears large sprays of showy rose pink flowers during the summer and fall. The vine is not hardy and will freeze back to the ground during most winters. It should be handled as if it were a herbaceous perennial. Mulching the roots and underground tubers provides protection for the plant in areas where temperatures drop much below 25° F. Queen's wreath

climbs on wire, lattice or fence support by means of tendrils. It is an excellent, attractive vine for the hot, dry areas of southern New Mexico.

***Polygonum auberti*, Silver Lace Vine.** A fast-growing deciduous to semievergreen vine, the silver lace vine climbs by twining its stems around the supporting structure. It produces dense foliage of heart-shaped, bright green leaves, 1.5 to 2 inches long. Small, creamy white flowers are produced in late spring and early summer. The vine is hardy in most areas of the state. Should winter injury occur, regrowth from the crown will flower in the fall. The species is useful where a fast-growing screen is desired on a trellis, lattice, or fence.

***Rosa banksiae*, Lady Bank's Rose.** Climbing roses are often treated as vines, although they have no means of attaching themselves to a supporting structure. They are frequently grown on trellises, fences, and walls, but they must be fastened in some manner if they are to remain erect. Several species and numerous varieties are classified as climbing roses. The Lady Bank's rose is a trouble-free, nearly thornless species that grows at a moderate rate and is often used as a vine. The foliage is a shiny, dark green with three to five leaflets. Small white flowers are borne in profusion in late spring to early summer. The species is excellent for use on arbors and trellises. The *R. banksiae lutea*, Lady Bank's yellow rose, is a more vigorous vine with small, double, yellow flowers.

***Tecomaria capensis*, Cape Honeysuckle.** A rapidly growing, semiclimbing shrub, this species is not related to the true honeysuckle. Cape honeysuckle is not hardy in New Mexico, and its use is limited to enclosed patios or well-protected places where temperatures never reach freezing. Bright, orange-red, trumpet-shaped flowers appear in the fall. This plant grows well in partial shade, but it prefers full sun.

***Wisteria sinensis*, Chinese Wisteria.** This is a woody, deciduous vine of moderate growth. Its leaves are large and compound, and it bears attractive violet blue flowers in dense, pendulous racemes in late March or early April before the leaves are fully developed.

Wisteria must be provided with a strong supporting structure because of its heavy vine growth. It is a versatile plant and can be trained to a tree or shrub form if desired. Pinching back young shoots results in more profuse bloom. Best performance will be obtained when planted in full sun. It is often used as a cover on pergolas, trellises, and similar structures.