



# J&L Garden Center

The All Season Gift and Garden Center

620 North 500 West Bountiful, Utah 801-292-0421

info@JLGardenCenter.com

www.JLGardenCenter.com

## Wisteria Vines

Few plants are as dramatic as a wisteria vine. The sight of a well-trained specimen in full bloom is a sight to see. Wisteria's elegant, draping flowers are showy in any setting. Not only is it a heavy bloomer from early to mid-spring, it also develops a colorful, dense, attractive greenery all summer and fall. Wisteria has a delightful fragrance. When a Chinese Wisteria is in full bloom, the sweet scent is wonderful, yet not overbearing. Wisteria often has a reputation for being difficult to start blooming. It may be strong willed, as are most vines, but its requirements are not too overbearing for a gardener who is handy with their pruning shears. *A word of caution, the bark and the seeds are poisonous, if ingested.*



Although there are about a dozen species of wisteria, including some native to North America, three are the most common: Chinese wisteria, Japanese wisteria, and Kentucky wisteria.

### Chinese Wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*)

Chinese wisteria have large, showy, fragrant, grape-like flower clusters. The clusters may grow 8" to 12" long. The flowers are boldly displayed in the early spring (late-April). The flower cluster opens all at once, and they bloom before the plants leaf out. They have dramatic flowers, with an intoxicating fragrance. It is a spectacular display to see.



Wisteria may take 5 to 8 years to bloom, especially if they are given excessive water or fertilizer when they are young. Putting the plants under stress may help them bloom at a younger age. See the section 'getting wisteria to bloom' for more information.

Chinese wisteria are available in whites, pinks and lavenders. The exact color of your wisteria vine may sometimes vary with the age of the plant, the soil pH, and the soil fertility.

**Chinese wisteria twine counter-clockwise around poles and trellises; just the opposite of Japanese Wisteria.**



The twining branches can grow to be 25' to 30' long, and have rich-green leaves. The plants are very cold hardy.

- sinensis** - violet-blue flowers.
- sinensis Alba** - pure-white flowers.
- sinensis Rosea** - pinkish flowers.

### Japanese Wisteria (*Wisteria floribunda*)

Japanese Wisteria blossom colors are sometimes more vibrant and striking than those of the Chinese wisteria.

Some plants may have amazing, cascading flowers that can grow up to two feet long. The individual blossoms of Japanese wisteria typically start opening from the base of the flower and open gradually to the tip of each flower. They bloom after the plants have leaves. Blossoms generally last longer than Chinese, but may not be quite as showy because of the leaves.



Just like the Chinese wisteria, they may take 5 to 8 years to bloom, especially if they are given excessive water or fertilizer when they are young. Putting the plants under stress may help them bloom at a younger age. See the section 'getting wisteria to bloom' for more information. Some of the hybrid Japanese varieties will bloom at a younger age than other varieties.

Japanese wisteria are available in whites, pinks, lavenders, and purples. Soil fertility, age of plant, and soil acidity may influence the final color.

**Japanese wisteria twine clockwise around poles and trellises; just the opposite of Chinese Wisteria.** The twining stems grow vigorously to a length of 20' to 25' and are best trained on arbors, trellises, or fences. Their compound leaves are bright green. They are not as winter hardy as the Chinese wisteria.



**Royal Purple** - Flowers at young age, sweetly scented. It is recognized as darkest purple of all single-flowering wisterias. Nice fragrance.

**Texas Purple** - Violet-lavender, grape-like clusters of flowers. Nice Fragrance.

**Issai Perfect** - Stunning chains of fragrant, white, pea-like flowers. Nice fragrance.

**Honbeni** - 18 inches long, pale-rose flowers tipped with lavender-purple. Light fragrance.

**Black Dragon** - Double-flowered, dark-purple blossoms. Sweet fragrance.



**Lavender Lace** - Large, bi-colored, lavender-blue and white flowers. Very Fragrant.

### **Kentucky Wisteria** - (*Wisteria macrostachya*)

A native wisteria species that is a bit more "tame" than the Chinese or Japanese wisteria varieties. Stems twine counterclockwise. These are 'extra-hardy' wisteria.

This species blooms on the current season's growth, and it may start flowering stage sooner than the other species. They flower a little later in spring, and some varieties re-bloom later in the summer.

They are slower growing plants, so they may be easier to control. They grow 15' to 25' and they have 8" to 12" flower clusters that are packed tight with blooms.

**Blue Moon** - Silvery-blue clusters, up to 12" long. Blooms in late spring. This variety often blooms again later in the summer; occasionally produces a third blossom when established. Cold-hardy to -30 F.

**'Clara Mack'**- Pure-white, fragrant flower clusters grow 7" to 12" long. Blooms in late spring.

**'Aunt Dee'** Has pale-lavender, lightly fragrant blossoms, 8" to 12" long. Blooms in late spring and sometimes blooms a second time once established.



### **Training wisteria**

Wisteria is not a self clinging vine, so it needs support. Wisteria will not damage house siding or grow into the brick. However, unless the trellis or the arbor is substantial, it may break it with the weight of its branches.

Wisteria can be shaped into a tree, but it is usually allowed just to vine naturally.

Trained horizontally, it can be kept low to the ground; trained vertically, it can peak over the top of a roof. It will provide shade for decks and walkways if grown on an arbor or pergola, or it can be trained in an espalier style on a wall.

Wisteria is commonly used to complement something, such as a wall, arbor, gazebo, or a porch. It covers brick or stone walls beautifully, and the amount of coverage can be regulated. If the plant is pruned and kept to a few limbs, the coverage will be minimal so that the wall remains the dominant feature. If allowed to grow vigorously, a wisteria can completely cover and hide an unattractive wall.

The most traditional way of training wisteria is up the sides, and along the top of a front porch, arbor, or balcony. This approach is especially impressive on older homes that have a grand, old-fashioned porch running the width of the house. Other uses involve training wisteria vines to cover decks, fence lines, walkways and other garden structures.



One advantage of training the vine on a trellis, or over a porch roof, is the wisteria's fragrance. The scent literally falls, and encompasses the entire area. Planting a vine below a window will not produce the same effect because the scent will not rise to enter through the window. Training a wisteria to stay at lower heights also has its advantages. Wisteria vines need to be pruned at least once every year, so you may want to keep it within ladder reach. It is very hard to prune a 20' tall vine.



Any support structure for wisteria should be built with cedar, redwood, or treated 2x4s or 4x4s that will last a long time. The result may look overbuilt, but over the years wisteria becomes large and heavy, and more importantly, the vine can break a trellis if it is not sturdy enough. A small 2' by 3' (1" x 1") trellis may work great for a clematis or a rose, but it would be disastrous for a wisteria.

Wisteria generally should not be allowed to intertwine itself with whatever it is attached to, especially anything permanent such as chain link fencing. Train the vine to stay on the surface of the trellis, or support, by using materials that will not girdle the young shoots, such as flexible plastic plant ties or loosely tied wire that is secured to eye bolts or galvanized nails.

### **Wisteria Culture**

Planting and caring for something as vigorous as wisteria requires forethought. Wisteria needs full sun and rich, well-drained soil. It should be placed in a location that will allow for a trunk diameter of 5" to 8" after ten years.



A wisteria grown as a tree should be placed several feet away from walls or other structures to allow it room to develop, and to leave room for pruning and maintenance of the structure.

South and west faces of buildings are preferred because of the light and warmth. However wisteria will grow and bloom well even on a sunny eastern exposure. The only place that might be inadequate is a shady site such as a northern exposure. The vine will still grow great, it just may not bloom very well.

Wisteria requires little, if any, fertilizer. In a lawn, or next to a flower garden, the wisteria may get more fertilizer than it needs. Too much nitrogen stimulates excessive stem and leaf growth; sometimes at the expense of flowers. When first planting, use a starter fertilizer such as **Dr. Earth Root Starter**. Later, use a low nitrogen, high phosphorus fertilizer such as **6-10-4 Vegetable and Flower Food**.

All wisterias will grow well from USDA Hardiness Zone 9 (20 degrees Fahrenheit) to Zones 4 (-30 degrees Fahrenheit). Sometimes the flower buds can be damaged by freezing temperatures regardless of the hardiness zone. The fact that wisteria is an early season bloomer increases the risk of bud damage due to late frosts.

## Pruning

Wisteria vines do not have to be pruned if they have room to climb and sprawl over everything in their path. A wisteria climbing a 30' shade tree or pine tree definitely does not need to be pruned. However, if you have limited space, or you want to enjoy more visible and abundant wisteria flowers, pruning is a necessary task.



Wisteria needs regular pruning to keep the growth and size under control. Wisteria is not fussy, it may be pruned every few months during the spring and summer if needed. However, if you do it wrong, you will get lots of new foliage and very few flowers. The purpose is to prune it enough to control and shape its growth, without reducing the spring flower display.

**Tip: Dormant Pruning (winter or early-spring) stimulates a lot of new growth. Summer Pruning (after blooming to late-summer) slows down aggressive growth.**

Newly planted vines, and vines that are 'out-of-control', benefit from dormant season pruning, both to stimulate new growth, and to eliminate unwanted excessive growth. Winter is the best time of year to do either some serious shaping and pruning, or to do just some minor, routine maintenance.

If nothing major needs to be done, prune the leader shoots back to only four or five buds and remove any suckers, especially any that start at the base of the plant.

**Note: Wisteria produce flower buds on old wood; the buds were formed the previous summer. Don't prune heavily in winter and early spring, because you'll be pruning off flower buds and encouraging new (non blooming) growth. You can improve flowering by pruning heavily right after bloom time, or in the early summer.**

Older vines that are in reasonably good condition benefit from a mid-summer and late-summer pruning, just to maintain their otherwise healthy condition.

Simply prune the long shoots of the current year's growth back to 6" to 12" long right after the vines have finished flowering. Remove any shoots not needed for the main framework of the plant, and remove any suckers.

This type of pruning may be done once, twice, or more frequently, depending on how much time you have, and how neat you want your vine to look. By pruning mid to late summer, you will also reduce the amount of early spring pruning that may be needed.

Many wisteria owners prune two, three or even four times during the growing season. An ideal schedule is an early-summer, mid-summer, and late-summer pruning; skipping the winter, or early-spring pruning.

Wisteria vine stems are not as pliable as they look, so handle the shoots with care. Don't twist their limbs the wrong way: Chinese wisterias twine counterclockwise (when viewed from



the top); Japanese wisterias twine clockwise. Respect these directions of growth, and the plants will be far more cooperative. However, it is really hard to harm a wisteria so badly that it cannot spring back - next spring.



You can encourage the development of flowering stems by regularly cutting the branches back to a few buds near the main limb. Over a period of years, these stubby branches will look like gnarled hands, producing all of the plant's leaves and blooms.

## Getting wisteria to bloom

Wisteria can fail to flower. If yours won't bloom, it may not be old enough. There is no single age at which all wisteria begin blooming, although six to ten years is a normal range, and twelve to fifteen years is not unheard of.

Certain cultivars are known to flower at an earlier age than others. Also, 'struggling' plants seem to bloom sooner than 'babied' plants. Wisteria just start blooming when they are good and ready. Sometimes, the only thing you can do is wait.

Late frosts, cold enough to freeze the flower buds, may cause the plant to fail to produce flowers. Watch the emerging buds and look for evidence of die-back. The buds will swell only to become blackened and damaged-looking. Keep in mind that this situation does not happen every year.

If your wisteria is old enough to bloom, and it is not, there are some things you can try.

**Very severe pruning.** Prune in the summer, after the normal bloom time. Be careful, severe pruning stimulates a lot of new growth and may aggravate the situation.



**Letting the roots dry out.** Let your plants actually wilt before watering them. If the plant thinks it is about to die, it will sometimes start blooming to produce seed.

**Withhold nitrogen fertilizer.** Fertilize with 0-45-0 or with 0-10-5 fertilizers; nitrogen encourages production of foliage at the expense of flowers.

**Root pruning:** Use a spade to cut vertically into the soil (about 18 inches deep) and about four feet from the main trunk, all around the vine.

**Girdle the trunk with a knife.** Push the knife through the bark into the heartwood of the plant. Ring the entire trunk but do not remove any bark. Do not push the knife hard enough to weaken the heartwood, or the branch may break, or die. You must girdle the trunk by late May to help force the wisteria to bloom the following spring.

**Damage the bark with a baseball bat.** Some gardeners are not daring enough to girdle the trunk. Hitting the bark with a smooth object does basically the same thing as girdling. It damages the cambium layer just under the bark, without killing the plant. Do not use a sharp object or you may cut or remove the bark, causing more damage than good.

**Rule of Thumb:** To help stimulate your plant to bloom NEXT YEAR, you need to 'Girdle', or 'Hit the bark with a bat', at the time when the wisteria should be blooming; but it's not. Too early, or too late, will not have the same effect. (This procedure also helps lilacs, and apple trees to bloom if they are being stubborn.)

One lady, after 20 years of pruning and fertilizing, simply gave up trying to get her wisteria to bloom. She cut the branches off, poured gasoline on the trunk and burned it down. The plant didn't die, and started blooming the following spring. It bloomed every year since.

Occasionally you may find a wisteria that just will not bloom no matter what you try. The only option is to either enjoy your green plant, or remove the plant and buy a new one: hopefully that is not your situation.

## A Practical Plant

Wisteria vines can be a useful garden plant in and out of flower. They adapt to and fill the space you provide, and they call for little more than periodic maintenance. These vines grow fast but they do not have the annoying, clinging habits of many other ornamental vines. But the best reason to grow a wisteria vine remains the fact that it will show its colorful, fragrant and extravagant floral display every spring.



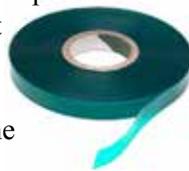
## Wisteria Trees

Unfortunately, wisteria trees are often hard to find, and usually very expensive to purchase. However, with a little effort and perseverance, they are usually very easy to create.



Gardeners willing to put time and effort into training a wisteria 'vine' into a wisteria 'tree' will end up with a unique, flowering, focal point for their yard. Neighbors will ask 'What is that Tree?' and 'Where Can I buy One?'

Training a wisteria vine into a tree shape is not difficult, but it requires consistent maintenance, and vigilance, to end up with a sturdy, aesthetically pleasing specimen. For best results, start training the wisteria when it is young.



1. Drive a 4-by-4-inch wooden post 12 inches into the ground. Make sure the post is 1 to 3 inches away from the base of the vine. The post should be 12 inches longer than the desired height of the wisteria tree's trunk.

2. Select the most vigorous main stem of the wisteria to become the tree's trunk. Remove all side shoots from along this stem.

3. Place the stem against the nearest side of the post. Tie the stem, with a stretching plastic material (Do not use wire or nylon twine) to the post to begin the staking process. Tie the stretch tie tight enough to provide support to the stem,



but loose enough to allow the stem some natural movement, and extra room to expand. Secure the stem in place every 8 inches. Try to make the stem in a straight, vertical line up the post, being careful not to twist or bend it too much.



4. Allow the stem to grow to the top of the post. Monitor regularly. Tie the stem to the post as it grows, spacing the ties 8 inches apart. Cut off all side shoots that develop on the bottom two-thirds of the stem. Adjust the old ties as needed, loosening them and retying them as needed to allow room for expansion of the stem's growth.

5. Cut off the top of the main stem once it reaches the top of the post. Allow the side shoots at the top of the stem to grow and develop.

6. Cut off the tips of the side branches once they develop six to seven leaves. This will encourage additional lateral shoots to develop and fill out the top of the tree. Keep the wisteria's lower trunk free from side shoots.



7. Prune out any dead, crossing or crowded branches in the late winter when the wisteria is dormant. Prune back all side shoots in the tree's canopy to a length of 12 inches. Check and re-tie any strips that have become too tight around the trunk.

8. After many years, and the trunk is strong and secure, you may remove the post if desired. If you leave it, make sure none of the tie straps are left to girdle the tree.

9. Once your tree starts blooming, wait to prune it until after it finishes blooming. If you prune in the fall or early spring, you are removing the blossoms. You can then train your tree to grow any size or shape you desire.

