

Going Vertical With Native Vines

by Margot Chalfant, Delaware Nature Society Land Preservation Coordinator

I prefer a garden with vertical drama. When there are no trees to anchor the sky to the ground, I build a support structure and plant a vine at its base. Usually, in one or two years, the vine has twirled its way up the form covering it with foliage and flowers. There are some fantastic native vines suited for the job and twelve will be available at the plant sale this year.

The selected native vines, proven to grow and perform well in a zone 6 climate, thrive in sun/part shade, in moist and well drained soils. Typically the more sun a vine receives the better its flower power. For an added bonus, our native vines support the needs of local animals, birds, insects, and soil organisms and contribute to the overall health of the natural environment.

Choosing the right native vine for the garden begins with establishing its purpose. A utility vine resolves a design problem or serves as a garden accent. Vines can be used to cover and hide a wall, conceal a view, enhance privacy, moderate temperatures, and highlight a garden feature such as a wall, trellis and gate. To cover a bare wall or tree trunk, go with an aggressive grower that climbs fast and establishes itself quickly, such as *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia Creeper), *Campsis radicans* (Trumpet Vine), or *Bignonia capreolata* (Crossvine). For privacy, consider a large leaf vine like *Aristolochia macrophylla*. Train vines, such as *Gelsemium sempervirens* 'Margarita', any *Campsis radicans* or *Lonicera sempervirens* to cascade over walls and trellises. For intimate encounters, plant *Wisteria macrostachya*, *Wisteria frutescens* Amethyst or *Clematis virginiana*, all with showy delicate flowers and interesting seed pods.

Vines have evolved to lure wildlife by scent, color, and form. Many of our native vines provide nectar for hummingbirds, butterflies and a compendium of insects. *Aristolochia macrophylla* attracts the rare Pipevine Swallowtail butterfly.

Gelsemium sempervirens 'Margarita', *Lonicera sempervirens* 'John Clayton' and 'Blanche', all *Campsis radicans*, and *Bignonia capreolata* attract hummingbirds with their trumpet shaped flowers. Plant several vines together to extend the bloom period across the hummingbird season for the greatest wildlife benefit, such as *Bignonia capreolata* with *Campsis radicans*.



Campsis radicans

This year's plant sale features five new vines. *Clematis virginiana* produces a profusion of delicate white and fragrant blooms in summer/ fall that turn into attractive feathery seed heads. A vigorous climber, *Bignonia capreolata* produces abundant and fragrant orange-red flowers that are displayed on top of glossy, semi-evergreen leaves. Combine this plant with another vigorous grower, *Campsis radicans* 'Huitan' that bears trumpet flowers of red to dark orange on the outside with yellow centers. A Gold Medal Award plant, *Gelsemium sempervirens* 'Margarita' is the first cold hardy Carolina Jessamine with clear yellow trumpet flowers and semi evergreen foliage. *Wisteria macrostachya* grows foot-long purple-lilac inflorescences, perfect for a small trellis or garden fence.

In my garden, I mix vine species and cultivars to add texture, bloom length, extend wildlife benefit, and increase overall enjoyment. At home, my moon gate supports three vines: a non-native clematis, native *Bignonia* and native *Wisteria*, which provides three seasons of flower and fruit show. This year I plan to make a living wall out of my 7' deer fence to block views from the driveway and invite the hummingbirds into my garden. Now can you imagine the new possibilities with native vines?

Margot is a licensed, registered landscape architect