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How to Grow Wisteria Vines



Photo Credit: Pixabay

Botanical Name:	<i>Wisteria</i> spp.
Plant Type:	Vine
Sun Exposure:	Full Sun, Part Sun

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Planting, Growing, and Pruning Wisteria

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)
Last Updated: April 30, 2025



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Wisteria blooms vigorously in spring, producing clusters of lilac-hued flowers on new growth. In late July, or after flowers have faded, it's time to prune. Learn more about growing and caring for wisteria vines.

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About Wisteria

Wisteria is a high-climbing, long-lived vining plant with cascades of blue to purple flowers that look spectacular hanging from a pergola or archway in spring and early summer. However, this vine is a fast and aggressive grower—often reaching 30+ feet long—and is known to grow quite heavy. Wisteria vines will work their way into any crook or cranny they can reach,

Wisteria flowers are beautifully fragrant, providing a feast for the senses. After flowering, a brown, bean-like pod stays on the plant until winter. Blooms only appear on new growth.

Note: Plant wisteria with caution! All parts of the wisteria plant contain substances called lectin and wisterin, which are toxic to pets, livestock, and humans. These toxins can cause anything from nausea and diarrhea to death if consumed in large amounts.

Is Wisteria an Invasive Plant?

Chinese wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*) and **Japanese wisteria** (*Wisteria floribunda*) are not native to North America and **are considered invasive species in some states**. The native wisteria species, American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*) and Kentucky wisteria (*Wisteria macrostachya*), are great alternatives to the Asian species, so if you're planning on adding a new wisteria to your garden, we

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Wondering how to tell the difference between the Asian and North American species?

Asian wisteria plants are aggressive growers with fuzzy seed pods, while North American wisteria plants are not quite as aggressive in their growing habits and have smooth seed pods and fruits, as well as more-or-less cylindrical, bean-shaped seeds. Another difference is that American and Kentucky wisteria's flowers appear after the plant has leafed out in the late spring, whereas the Chinese wisteria's blooms appear before its foliage.



Read Next

- [Having a Vine Time with Perennial Vines](#)
- [How to Get Rid of Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, Kudzu, and Mesquite](#)
- [50 Fall Flowers and Plants for Autumn!](#)

PLANTING

When to Plant Wisteria

- Plant in the spring or fall while the plant is dormant.
- Wisteria can be grown from seed, but those grown from seed often take quite a few years to reach maturity and produce flowers. It's recommended to purchase established wisteria plants or start from a cutting.

- Plant in full sun. Though wisteria will grow in partial shade, it probably won't flower. Sunlight is essential.
- Plant wisteria in fertile, moist, but well-draining soil.
- Add compost if your soil is in poor condition; otherwise, wisteria will grow in most soils. Learn more about [soil amendments](#) and [preparing soil for planting](#).
- Choose a site away from other plants, as wisteria grows quickly and can easily overtake its neighbors.
- Wisteria is also known for growing onto (and into) nearby structures, such as houses, garages, sheds, and so on. We strongly recommend **not** planting wisteria too close to your home!
- Wisteria vines require a very sturdy structure to climb on, such as a metal or wooden trellis or pergola. Mature plants have been known to get so heavy that they break their supports, so plan with care and build your structure with hefty materials.



Wisteria looks lovely climbing up the side of a home, but plant with caution; wisteria vines are very powerful and will find their way into any crack or crevice!

How to Plant Wisteria

- Dig a hole as deep as the root ball and 2 to 3 times as wide.
- Space plants 10 to 15 feet apart.

GROWING

Caring for Wisteria

- Each spring, apply a layer of compost under the plant and a 2-inch layer of mulch to retain moisture and control weeds.
- Some gardeners swear by phosphorus to aid with flowering. Scratch a couple of cups of bone meal into the soil in the spring and then add some rock

about liquid tomato or rose fertilizer.

[Read more about soil amendments.](#)

- Water your plants if you receive less than one inch of rain each week. (To know how much rain you are getting, you can place an empty food can outside and measure the depth of water with a measuring stick.)
- For more blooms, try cutting back the rampant shoots every two weeks during the summer.

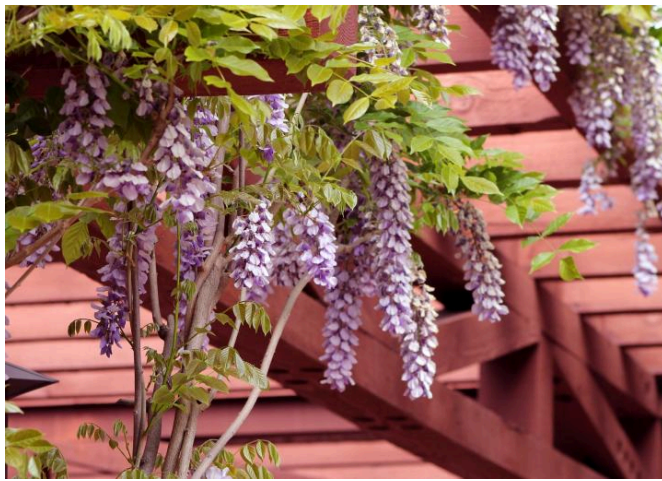
Pruning Wisteria

Pruning is the secret to good flowering, as wisteria **only blooms on new wood**.

Prune established wisteria in July or after flowers have faded. Cut side shoots to about 6 inches long, while retaining the climbing branches. This will create lots of short spurs all along the main vines. In late winter, prune the same side shoots, leaving two or three buds on each.

Just don't make the mistake of never pruning. Do the following at any time:

- When pruning an established but untamed plant, be ruthless. Cut the stem several feet below the desired height; there will be an upsurge of new vegetative (not flowering) shoots in the following spring. Give it space to grow and full sun.
- Remove suckers from the base of the plant to control spread.
- Remove seedpods at will or leave a few for winter interest. If you bring any indoors for display/decoration, be aware that the ambient warmth of the home may cause them to explode.
- Do you have a new wisteria? Cut the vine back severely right after planting. Then, the next year, cut the main stem or stems back to 3 feet of the previous season's growth. Once the framework is full size, shorten further extension growth in midsummer to where growth began for that season.
- [Get more tips for pruning wisteria.](#)



When Your Wisteria Won't Bloom

Wisteria are notorious for taking a long time to bloom. Don't expect flowers for 2 to 3 years after planting. Some readers have sworn by this method of "shocking" the plant to spur on blooming:

- Take a shovel and drive it 8 to 10 inches into the ground about a foot and a half away from the wisteria's main trunk to slice into some of the roots.
- Damage about half of the roots and the bush will be shocked into reproduction (flowering).
- Don't worry—it's difficult to hurt this rampantly-growing, unrestrained, often-invasive plant!

Failure to flower may also be due to frigid winter temperatures that have injured the flower buds, excessive nitrogen fertilizer that has promoted foliage over flowers, and/or insufficient sunlight.

Types

Native Wisteria

If you are located in North America, consider planting a species of wisteria native to the continent, such as:

- **American wisteria** (*Wisteria*

Florida and north up through New York, Iowa, and Michigan. The vine grows 25 to 30 feet long with shiny, dark-green leaves and large, drooping lilac or purple-blue flower clusters which appear after the plant has leafed out. The blooms will only appear on new wood. However, note that the flowers tend to be more lightly fragrant than the Asian wisterias' flowers.

- **Kentucky wisteria** (*Wisteria macrostachya*), which grows in Zones 4 to 9. This late-season bloomer is native to the southeastern U.S. and is similar to American wisteria (it is sometimes considered a variety or subspecies of American wisteria). Kentucky wisteria bears mildly fragrant bluish-purple flowers after growing only two to three years, making it the quickest wisteria to bloom.
 - **'Blue Moon'** is an extra-hardy cultivar of native Kentucky wisteria, with showy, silvery-blue clusters. It blooms in late spring or early summer. It's cold hardy to -30°F.

- **Chinese wisteria** (*Wisteria sinensis*) and **Japanese wisteria** (*Wisteria floribunda*) are non-native, invasive species, so we do not recommend them for North American gardens, despite the fact that they are regularly sold at nurseries and garden centers. They are hardy in Zones 5 to 9 and are capable of growing 30 to 60 feet in length (and beyond in the Southern U.S.). Two common varieties of Japanese wisteria include:
 - **‘Honbeni’** (syn. ‘Honko’): popular, bears clusters of pink flowers in late spring
 - **‘Alba’** (syn. ‘Shiro Noda’): bears lovely clusters of pure-white flowers in late spring



Droopy wisteria blooms are spectacular in a bouquet.

- Gently cut a branch with just-opened flowers.
- Recut the branch at an angle or cut straight up the bottom of the stem to allow more water intake.
- Remove most of the leaves and place them in a sturdy vase.
- Vase life is about 7 days.

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- **Leaf miners**
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WIT AND WISDOM

Are Wisteria Toxic to Pets and Humans?

Yes, all parts of the wisteria plant contain substances called **lectin** and **wisterin**, which are toxic to pets, livestock, and humans. These toxins can cause anything from nausea and diarrhea to death if consumed in large amounts.

The substance is especially concentrated in the plant's seeds and seedpods, so removing the seedpods after the plant has flowered is a good idea if pets or children are often nearby. The seedpods do not have a foul flavor or an immediate ef-

your local poison control center in case of ingestion.

Fun Fact!

Wisteria Lane, the fictional setting of the popular drama *Desperate Housewives*, was named after this gorgeous vining flower.

VINES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Lauren H (not verified) 8 months 3 weeks ago

We purchased a home last year that has two, rather old-looking and very long wisteria plants. I need to relocate them since they're growing up our house and into our attic vent. What's the best time of year and way to do this?

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REPLY

Wister may be hard to transplant due to a coarse root system. If you must move it, do so in the late fall and dig as much of the root mass up as you can.

REPLY

J D (not verified) 8 months 3 weeks ago

Wisteria has been on our property since we moved here in 1986, I have tried repeatedly to eradicate it with no success. I have cut it back often and dug up roots. I have tried multiple herbicides in past years, with minimal success. This year I tried a different weed killer Eliminator Total Weed Killer by Go Tech, Inc., which is sold in Big Box Stores) and it seems to be working, time will tell. Do not plant wisteria, or bamboo and your gardening life will be better!

REPLY

Chris Yeager (not verified) 10 months 3

Don't plant it!!! Kills young trees by strangling them. You can't kill it! Sure it's beautiful for about 2 weeks out the year but the damage they do isn't worth it. The roots will span out causing it to spread to places you don't want it. Destroyed an above ground pool before we were able to kill it. We dug up a root that was 40' long and the size of your leg! Maybe they have genetically re-engineered to not be as aggressive but I'm not taking the chance.

REPLY

Brian S (not verified) 10 months 3 weeks ago
Wisteria will strangle any tree that is not fully mature as it wraps around it.

REPLY

Barbara Clyatt (not verified) 1 year 9 months ago
Is wisteria a parasite eventually killing that which it grows on. Here in the south I have enjoyed its lovely displays of clustered blooms

[REPLY](#)**The Editors** 1 year 9 months ago

Barbara-

Wisteria can become exceedingly heavy and break the tree that it grows on. For the health of the tree, we recommend keeping it pruned to a manageable size or moving it to a different location.

[REPLY](#)

Donna Shore (not verified) 1 year 10 months ago

my wisteria was well established and flowered beautifully last year. However my apt complex decided to build a new fence and cut my wisteria down, It is now coming back with new growth and tendrils are growing vigorously. What kind of trellis should I use?

Sherry Lawrence (not verified) 4

weeks ago

Will an iron deck railing support a
plant, planted in a whiskey barrel on a
second level?

Will the plant be bothered by deer
and squirrels?

REPLY

Eric Greeson (not verified) 1 year 9

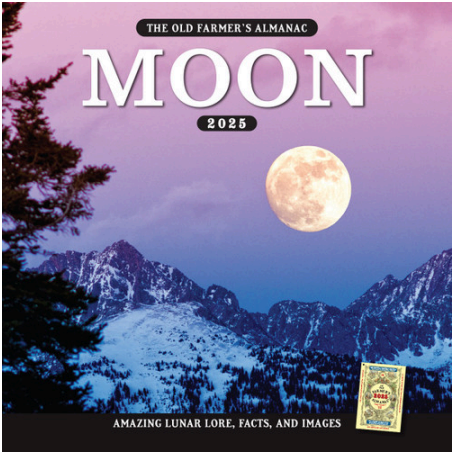
months ago

Mine in NC if kept cut back will sup-
port it self . My first thought was
There fence LOL

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

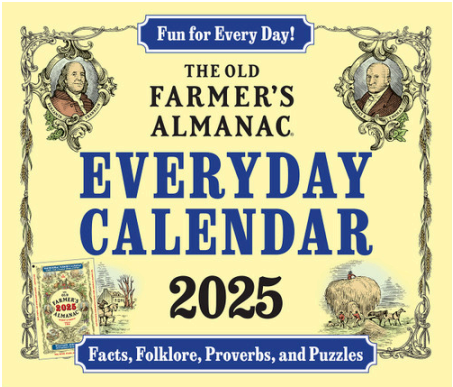
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