



Fine Vines for Quick Displays

Scarlet runner bean creates a privacy screen in this verdant garden nook.



Use fast-growing but well-behaved climbers to add almost instant color to the garden all season.

BY RITA PELCZAR

ANNUAL AND tender perennial vines are the aerial acrobats of the summer garden. As if shot from a cannon, they quickly scale fences, cover trellises, and tumble over walls. In a single season, many grow 15 to 20 feet tall and produce an extended flower show while they're at it!

Sure, this speedy growth may make certain vines pests, but there are plenty of choices that won't take over the world. The following are some of the showiest, carefree, and well-behaved climbers for gardens across the country.

CLIMBING CANARIES AND BUTTERFLIES

Yellow-flowered canary creeper (*Tropaeolum peregrinum*, USDA Hardiness Zones 9–10, AHS Heat Zones 10–5) grows 10 feet tall, using its threadlike petioles to grasp onto supports. Native to the Andes mountains, this tender South American perennial bears an abundance of one-inch blooms from summer to fall. Each flower has five petals, the upper two are wide spread and fringed, resembling wings of a small bird. The deeply lobed gray-green leaves are an inch or two across.

It's a favorite of garden writer Marty Wingate of Mountlake Terrace, Washington, who loves its "whiskery yellow flowers." Start it from seed a month or so before transplanting it to the garden after the last hard frost. Adaptable to full sun or light shade, it needs moist, well-drained soil. If allowed to climb through a shrub, it will appear as if a flock of canaries has landed there. "This is a great little scrambler, never growing too far," Wingate adds.

The yellow butterfly vine (*Callaeum macropterum*, syn. *Mascagnia macroptera*, Zones 8–11, 11–6) produces bright yellow blooms from spring to summer, followed by winged seedpods. Horticultural consultant and garden writer Mary Irish of Castroville, Texas, suggests planting it "where you can see the odd, whirly-gig flowers up



Left: The canary creeper is a great choice for hanging baskets or for weaving through shrubs. **Above:** The butterfly vine's clusters of dainty summer flowers are followed by chartreuse seedpods that resemble butterflies.

close." The papery winged seedpods that follow are the source of the common name.

Grown as an annual in most regions, it is an evergreen perennial in its native Mexico and the southwestern United States. Its twining stems can climb 10 to 20 feet. Although the vine thrives in full sun, Irish says it does well for her in part shade, too. It is also quite drought tolerant.

A SCENTED ASCENT

Some vines enhance their charms with fragrance. Among the most fragrant is sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratus*, Zones 0–10, 8–1), a cool-season annual from the Mediterranean region that thrives where summers are mild. The flowers appear in clusters from spring to early summer, or longer if regularly dead-



Annual sweet peas fill a garden—or a vase—with their heady fragrance and vibrant colors from spring to early summer.

headed. Numerous cultivars are available in a rainbow of colors. One of the most fragrant is 'Cupani', a heat-tolerant heirloom with bicolor maroon and violet flowers.

In regions where the ground doesn't freeze, sow seeds in fall. Elsewhere, sow in spring as soon as the soil can be worked, or get a head start by sowing seeds indoors six or seven weeks before the last expected frost. Grow sweet peas in rich, well-drained soil and full sun. The vine's winged stems produce terminal tendrils that help them climb six to eight feet.

It's easy to guess how the corkscrew vine (*Cochliasanthus caracalla*, syn. *Vigna caracalla*, Zones 9–11, 11–5) got its com-

mon name—just take a look at the flowers. "Corkscrew vine is a visual delight, blooming all season with bunches of spiraling flowers resembling a corkscrew or snail shell," explains Dennis Schrader, co-owner of Landcraft Environments, a wholesale nursery in Long Island, New York. "Each flower starts off as a white bud, maturing to pinkish lavender, then ultimately fading to a pale fawn color," he adds.

The flower's delightful scent has been likened to lilac, hyacinth, and jasmine. "We plant this amazing vine on an arbor, close to a pathway so we can enjoy the heady fragrance," says Schrader. Growing 10 to 20 feet tall, this South American native flowers

from summer into fall. A tender perennial grown mainly as an annual, it needs full sun and enriched, well drained soil to perform best. In the warmest regions of the United States, it is perennial.

DELICIOUSLY PRETTY

Red Malabar spinach (*Basella alba* 'Rubra', syn. *Basella rubra*, Zones 10–11, 11–5) is a poster child for edible ornamentals. Native to eastern Asia, it grows easily from seed sown directly in the garden after the soil has warmed in spring. It thrives in hot weather and full sun. The twining, deep red stems ascend 10 to 15 feet, producing shiny dark leaves and



late-summer clusters of white to purple flowers. The leaves, which have a mild flavor, make a good hot-weather substitute for spinach.

"What a fun and tasty plant to grow for its architectural, visual, and culinary aspects," says Schrader. He places it "on a rustic locust wood arbor in full sun where the interesting flowers, vivid burgundy stems, and lustrous succulent leaves can be enjoyed."

Two more heat-loving edible vines to consider are scarlet runner bean (*Phaseolus coccineus*, Zones 9–11, 12–4) and hyacinth bean (*Lablab purpureus*, syn. *Dolichos lablab*, Zones 9–11, 12–6). Perennial in their native regions—the former hails from Central America, the latter from tropical Africa—both grow quickly from seed, with their twining stems reaching 10 to 20 feet in length. They produce sum-



Above, left: The fragrant blooms of corkscrew vine turn from white to lavender-pink to dusty rose. Below, left: Hyacinth bean cloaks an arbor with its large, heart-shaped leaves and spikes of purple pealike blooms.

mer-long flowers that attract bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. The flowers of both, along with the pods, are edible.

The scarlet runner bean bears red flowers that stand out boldly against its green trifoliate leaves. A couple summers ago, I sowed seeds around my scarecrow, Miss Scarlet. The vine accessorized her in eye-catching color all summer.

"Hyacinth bean is a reliable choice as an annual vine here in the Midwest," says Denny Schrock, Master Gardener coordinator at Iowa State University in Ames. "Even before the panicles of rosy blooms appear, the purple-maroon tones of the foliage provide interest. The flowers are followed by clusters of purple-podded beans that are even showier than the blossoms."

Sources

Almost Eden, Merryville, LA.
www.almostedenplants.com.

Renee's Garden Seeds, Felton, CA.
www.reneesgarden.com.

Select Seeds, Union, CT.
www.selectseeds.com.

Summer Hill Seeds, Whittington, IL.
www.summerhillseeds.com.

CLIMBING HIGH

A vine's stems lack the rigidity to stand upright, yet that doesn't stop it from reaching great heights in no time. Contemplating how a vine achieves this, I find myself in good company. Both Asa Gray, perhaps the most influential American botanist of the 19th century, and his friend, Charles Darwin, were fascinated by and published detailed observations about the climbing mechanisms vines employ. They noted that some vines cling to vertical surfaces with aerial roots or specialized adhesive tendrils. Others simply lean on or droop over nearby structures or plants. And some vines climb by twining their stems, petioles (leaf stems), or tendrils around any handy, appropriately sized support.

Whatever the strategy, it affects the type of climbing structure needed to display the vine to best effect. As you consider vines for your garden, keep in mind how and what they will climb. (For ideas for vine supports, see page 52.)

—R.P.

adds Schrock. He grows it on a steel-framed arbor that leads from his deck to the backyard, where it "loves the heat and humidity of summer, providing an attractive display until the first freezes of fall," he says.

BLOOMS OF UNUSUAL SHAPE

The cup-and-saucer vine (*Cobaea scandens*, Zones 9–11, 11–4) is perennial in its native Mexico and tropical South America, as well as the warmest regions of the United States. Elsewhere, it is grown as an annual. Using tendrils to attach to its support, it will climb as much as 20 feet in one season.

Its distinctive blooms appear in late summer and fall; each three-inch flower is composed of a "cup"—the fluted petals—and "saucer"—the flower's calyx. The blooms emerge pale green and mature to purple with a honeylike scent. 'Alba' is a white-flowered selection.

This vine benefits from an early start, so sow seeds indoors eight to 10 weeks prior to your last expected frost. "It can grow well in the maritime Pacific Northwest, but is best if started early, or started the



Top: The flowers of cup-and-saucer vine open pale green, maturing to vibrant purple. Above: The Mexican flame vine attracts monarch butterflies, among other pollinators.

MORE QUICK-GROWING CLIMBERS TO CONSIDER

Name	Height (feet)	Flowers	USDA Hardiness, AHS Heat Zones
<i>Eccremocarpus scaber</i> (Chilean glory vine)	8–12	Tubular, one-inch, red-orange flowers; blooms late spring to fall	10–11, 12–1
<i>Ipomoea alba</i> (Moonflower)	15–20	Fragrant, white blooms to six inches across, open at night; blooms summer to fall	10–11, 12–5
<i>Ipomoea lobata</i> (Spanish flag)	6–15	Racemes of tubular flowers open red, turn to orange, yellow, white; blooms summer to fall	10–11, 12–7
<i>Maurandya scandens</i> syn. <i>Asarina scandens</i> (Creeping gloxinia)	3–8	Tubular, two-lipped lavender flowers with lighter throat; blooms late summer to fall	9–11, 10–7
<i>Rhodochiton atrosanguineus</i> (Purple bell vine)	10–12	Tubular, pendant, deep purple flowers with red or pink calyx; blooms summer to fall	10–11, 10–7
<i>Thunbergia alata</i> (Black-eyed Susan vine)	5–8	Yellow, orange, or white funnel-shaped flowers usually with dark centers; blooms summer and fall	11, 12–3
<i>Thunbergia grandiflora</i> (Blue trumpet vine)	6–10	Drooping, sky-blue flowers with yellow throats; blooms in summer	10–11, 12–6



Ipomoea alba



Rhodochiton atrosanguineus

autumn before and kept in an unheated greenhouse," says Wingate. "It will overwinter in really mild spots, such as along the coast, and in those cases, becomes quite rambunctious," she says. It thrives in full sun, but appreciates some afternoon shade in warmer climates.

POPULAR WITH POLLINATORS

All sorts of bees and butterflies will flock to a blooming Mexican flame vine (*Pseudognaphalium chenopodioides*, syn. *Senecio confusus*, Zones 9–11, 12–7). It grows rapidly—six to 10 feet in one season—producing four-inch, coarsely toothed, dark green leaves

that offer an attractive foil for the orange one- to two-inch blooms.

"The brilliant orange wheels of daisylke flowers begin in the winter here [in Texas]," reports Irish. "If the plant does not freeze, then it is a good source of striking color for the entire spring, summer, and even the fall," she adds.

Mexican flame vine is perennial in its native habitat of Mexico to Central America, but it is grown as an annual in all but the warmest regions of the United States.

Because it takes a long time for seed-grown plants to reach the flowering stage, it is best to purchase young plants

that can be placed in the garden as soon as the soil warms in spring. Best flower production is in full sun and plants are quite drought-tolerant once established.

Supported by fences, trellises, arbors, light posts, and mailboxes, annual and tender perennial vines can quickly lift your garden to new heights with their high-climbing foliage and colorful blooms. With so many to choose from, deciding which ones to try first may be your biggest challenge. ☀

Rita Pelczar is a contributing editor for The American Gardener. She gardens in North Carolina.