

Wisteria

Wisterias are considered to be one of the most beautiful, sought out flowering vines to grow in your garden. With their dangling, delicate flowers in full bloom, you would think your garden is situated in a tropical paradise.

There are several different varieties of Wisteria. The two most common species are the Japanese (*Wisteria floribunda*) and Chinese (*Wisteria sinensis*) Wisteria. Their differences are only noticed when examined carefully. One of the differences of each is the way they twine on a structure. Japanese Wisteria twines in a clockwise direction and Chinese Wisteria twines counterclockwise. Both have extraordinary flowers that will amaze anyone in full bloom. Although, varieties of *Chinese Wisteria are known to flower at a much younger age and more readily than the Japanese varieties which are known to be stubborn.* .

Location: Wisterias prefer to be planted deep in well – drained loamy soil with a slightly alkaline (sweet) pH level. (The level of acidity or sweetness of soil is measured on a scale from 1 to 14 and is called the pH scale. In the centre of the scale, 7 is considered to be neutral, any number below 7 is acidic and any number above 7 is alkaline). It also prefers full sun, and moistened soil during hot and dry spells.

Flowering: The most frequently heard comment regarding Wisteria is: “I can’t get my Wisteria to flower.” This is obviously of great concern but is easily remedied. First of all Wisterias usually do not flower when they are young. It may take up to *five* years before they start to bloom. Another problem that prevents them from blooming is lack of sun. They need bright light, which is required for them to produce flowering buds. A third problem may be that they are well provided for. *Too much water and fertilizer* will make them devote most of their energy in producing leaves and newer growth, instead of flower buds. Once planted it is best to leave the fertility of the soil alone. Allowing Wisterias to be in slight *stress* will force the vine to produce flowering buds. Also, it is important to try to buy varieties that are grafted and not seed grown as grafted varieties have proven to be earlier bloomers in our climate zone.

Pruning: Another way to induce flowering, is through pruning techniques. Flowers are produced on spurs at the base of stems. Removal of these will impede flowering potential. This is why it is so essential to prune correctly. Each **spring** long vertical shoots should be removed to encourage side shoot development. Once horizontal side (mature) shoots and branches are fully developed and attached to a structure, all new shoots should be removed in the spring. This encourages flowering spurs to develop at the base of the cut shoots for more flowers the following spring. Any heavy pruning, major reshaping or cosmetic pruning should be done *right after flowering*. Wisterias are normally grafted, so if any shoots (suckers) grow from the base of the vine, they should be removed immediately, for these unwanted shoots can take over and smother the parent plant. When Wisterias still have difficulties in flowering after all pruning measures have been applied, then they need to be root pruned. It is recommended to root prune, which

puts the vine under stress. This forces the plant to produce flower buds, when normally it would not produce at all. In early spring drive a sharp spade into the ground around the base of the vine at least 3 feet away from the main trunk of the plant. *Do not overly slash the roots for this may cause more harm than good.* Be sure not to make slashes straight across the ground. You may sever a large root completely. Slash only a few times haphazardly around the base. This should be enough to cause the vine to go under just enough stress to make it flower.

Fertilizing: The more rich and fertile the soil is, the more Wisterias will become too lazy or comfortable to flower. *Avoid using fertilizers with high levels of **nitrogen**.* Nitrogen causes vegetative growth (foliage) and the vine could become too overwhelming. When transplanting it is advisable to use a transplanting fertilizer to help generate roots. Overall, using fertilizers sparingly is advised, but if necessary use a formulation that is high in phosphorous, like; Superphosphate 0-20-0. This formulation will aid in flower bud formation without encouraging excessive foliar development.