



One way to get great color, texture, bloom and height into any outdoor space is with annual vines. It really takes just a little bit of extra work on and off throughout the growing season to get instant garden gratification – or as close as gardeners ever get. Most of the vines (often in seed form) that can be readily found go way beyond a choice of red or blue morning glories. Many are tropical or subtropical in origin, and fortunately, will flower (and then die from the cold) their first year – making them perfect for our annual garden needs. In general, most of these vines are very easy to grow and care for. And of course there are exceptions - some can be temperamental to get started, while others may be reticent to provide viable seed for collection at the end of the season. Both the common and scientific names of these vines are as colorful as the leaves, blooms, and fruit that they produce for our enjoyment. Their beauty and diversity should not be ignored as those qualities will surprise you as they quickly fill vertical voids and cover unsightly areas with multi-dimensional interest.

*Aristolochia durior*, common name – Dutchman's pipe - likes full sun to partial shade and will grow to about 30'. The mottled coloring on the interior of the pipe-shaped flowers (hence the common name) is somewhat purplish with the outer coloring a nice peachy-yellow. The large green leaves will very quickly cover a large area, providing dense shade as it twists and twines its way around anything that stands still.

*Basella alba*, or Malabar spinach, does best in full sun, loves the heat, and even though this vine is not a true spinach, the leaves are quite edible, tasting best when young. The greenish-red leaves are showy by themselves but look extra good when the white flower spikes bloom.

*Basella rubra* has good overall form with the leaves showing a bit more red coloration and light magenta bloom spikes.

*Canavalia gladiata* (sword bean) takes full sun, has medium green, heart shaped leaves that cover lots of ground quickly. The pinkish lavender summer flowers look a bit like an orchid in form and the broad huge pods that follow will immediately have you looking over your

shoulder for the presence of Jack's beanstalk giant. These huge pods make harvesting seed easy for future plantings. Although this vine is frequently grown and used for animal food in Asia and Africa – it is not used much in the U.S.

*Cardiospermum halicacabum* or love-in-a-puff, is a fun vine that likes full sun with a loose growth habit that does well when inter-planted with other garden goodies. The white flowers are small, kind of blah really, the fruit puffs that follow are the fascinating thing to watch as they expand and grow, turning from green to brown – at which point you know the seed is ready to harvest. While the seed is interesting to look at – it's black with a white heart pattern – saving this one for future plantings is easy.

*Cobaea scandens* – the common name will be seen as either cup and saucer vine or missionary bells. These vines love full sun and need to be kept well-watered, growing 10' to 15' in one season. The flowers appear summer through fall, are 2" – 3" across, and start out a clear green, turning to violet/blue hues when mature with the saucer portion (the calyx) remaining a nice green. The flowers are followed by large, plum-shaped fruits producing seed that can be collected in the fall for spring planting, after frost danger has passed. 'Alba' variety has pretty white flowers, is somewhat easy to find, grow, and propagate from seed. 'Variegata' has unusual and desirable variegated foliage, but it can be difficult to find, and relatively expensive as it must be vegetatively propagated.

(*Dolichos*) *Lablab purpureus* – Hyacinth bean – grows well in full sun, responds well to fertilizer, but only when applied early in the season. Expect 10' – 20' feet of dark, leafy, vine growth in one season, with summer bringing pretty, fragrant purple flowers, followed by development of 6" purple bean pods. Seed pods can be harvested in the fall for planting in spring. 'Alba' variety has white flowers and pods; 'Ruby Moon' has pink and purple flowers followed by purple pods.

*Gloriosa superba* or glory lily thrives in full sun, and prefers well drained soil situations with plenty of moisture. Grown from a tuber, these vines will do well started indoors about a month before moving to an outside planter – but do so

only when the weather is well past frost. The 3" – 4" lily-like flowers emerge late summer or early in the fall, rising brightly from the glossy green leaves. This vine can be expensive and a bit difficult to find, but if kept healthy during the growing season and the tuber brought in for winter storage prior to a killing frost, it will give you many years of enjoyment. 'Rothschildiana' is a mix of red flowers with a yellow edging; 'Citrina' has a nice solid yellow flower coloring.

The *Ipomoea*'s offer a variety of choices - and while you may either love or hate this group that claims morning glories as a fond member - they do offer a beautiful range of forms and colors, giving a fantastic return for a minimum amount of time and materials. *I. alba* is also lovingly called the moon vine, as the 6" white flowers open late in the afternoon into the evening, each impressive bloom lasting only one night. These vines like full sun to partial shade, if provided with adequate moisture, expect 10 feet plus in growth. *I. batatas* or the popular sweet potato vine, does best in full sun but will take partial shade, likes lots of water, growing up to 2' per week. 'Black Heart' or 'Ace of Spades' (same plant sold under both names) have dark purple, heart-shaped foliage; 'Pink Frost' has variegated pink, green, and white foliage and a more controlled growth habit; 'Ivory Jewel' shows off bright green and white leaves. 'Margarita', 'Marguerita', or 'Marguerite' is an extremely popular variety with lime green leaves, very hearty growth, and a good trailing habit that is easy to keep under control with a bit of pinching. *I. lobata* – Spanish flag – will do equally well in full sun or part shade, and can grow to about 15' in one season. This vine produces elongated and curved 1" long flowers that turn from red to yellow as they mature, flowers continue to develop as the plant grows. Not a tremendously vigorous vine, it has a nice controlled habit. *I. quamoclit* or cyress vine, grows quickly in full sun, producing numerous, 1" red or white flowers on delicate looking, ferny foliage. *I. tricolor* is well known as the morning glory vine. Either you love it or you hate it, but you have to appreciate its ability to thrive under adverse conditions, as long as it has some sun. The unfortunate side of this vine is that as a prolific flower producer, the results are often seedlings that can pop up all over. Flowers have a wide range of colors and forms but are generally 2' – 3' across. 'Heavenly Blue' is as blue as flowers get, producing lots of flowers; 'Pearly Gates' have creamy white flowers; 'Magenta' is deep reddish purple; 'Kniola's Black' is the deepest purple going almost to a

black; 'Grandpa Ott's' is a nice historical variety with flowers of purplish–pink with a red center; 'Chocolate' has the look of cocoa powder carrying a tinge of raspberry with an edging of white frosting. 'Sunrise Serenade' has beautiful white centered, double flowers with bright magenta petal tones. *I. x sloteri* – cardinal climber – when planted in full sun, you will be rewarded with fast growth up to 20 feet, and lots of 1" – 2" wide, intensely red, fluted flowers on nicely sized, palm-shaped, tropical looking foliage.

*Mandevilla sanderi* or Brazilian jasmine loves full sun, easily growing to about 8 feet, but it is not unusual to see them reach up to 20 feet, if really happy - and if the season is long and warm. In the last few years, a lot more these are being sold as potted flowering plants in the garden centers – with good reason. This tropical vine does wonderfully in our summer heat and humidity, producing loads of beautiful, funnel shaped 1" – 2" long flowers throughout the entire growing season. If you have the space, it responds well to over-wintering inside, when sufficiently acclimated. There are many different varieties to choose from. *M. laxa* – Chilean jasmine - is very fragrant, producing 3" cream flowers on pretty, glossy green foliage, with the leaves often having gray or purplish undersides – growing best in full sun.

*Passiflora*, also called Passion flower, likes to be in full sun, but does not like nitrogen - too much will increase leaf production but reduces flowering, can be difficult to grow long enough to produce fruit in the north. *P. caerulea* produces blue flowers; *P. citrina* - bright yellow flowers; *P. coccinea* – bright red flowers; *P. serratifolia* – double flower; *P. subpeltata* – white flowers; *P. violacea* – violet/magenta flowers.

*Phaseolus coccineus* or scarlet runner bean grows happily in full sun producing vibrant red flowers from mid-summer through to frost. The flowers are followed by edible beans that turn from green to purple as they age, the seeds within the pods are a combination of mottled red and black. These can be harvested and either used as dried beans or planted in the spring. 'Painted Lady' is a form that has flowers of salmon and white producing seeds of a pretty mottled brown.

*Rhodochiton atrosanguineus*, also known as Chinese purple bell vine, likes full sun, and does best when started indoors six weeks before last frost. The dark fuchsia to

red 2" – 2 ½" bell-shaped flowers hanging down from the dark green/purplish leaves and vine stems. These are followed by balloon shaped fruits producing seed that can be harvested for immediate planting.

*Solanum crispum*, or potato vine, love full sun, and will grow to about 12' producing nice lavender/blue flowers on woody vines. *S. jasminoides* – also a potato vine, also likes full sun, but produces white flowers that form and bloom as the plants mature. This vine does best when started indoors in late fall and moved outdoors in spring. 'Alba' is a good grower with white flowers and dark green leaves; *S. seaforthianum* produces 1" wide bluish flowers on a vine that will grow to about 15', if happy; *S. wendlandii* or paradise flower is also a full sun plant with large bluish flowers.

*Thunbergia alata* is commonly called the black-eyed susan vine. These vines will do well in either full sun or partial shade if kept sufficiently watered. The elongated 1" yellow-orange flowers appear in late summer on nicely shaped green leaves. 'Alba' has creamy white flowers; 'Aurantiaca' - bright orange flowers; and 'Sulphurea' – bright yellow flowers, all with dark eyes. *T. grandiflora* or sky vine, prefers full sun, producing large leaves with 3" wide blue flowers showing in late summer; 'Alba' has white flowers; *T. gregorii* - deep brownish orange flowers.

*Vigna caracalla* – snail vine, loves full sun, can grow up to 10' in one season, with the flowers not showing late in the season. As the common name suggests, the curly pinkish/lavender blooms really do look like snail shells. This vine can be difficult to find in seed form, often more readily available as a bare root or potted plant. Take it any way you can get it – it is an unusual vine to have in the yard, one that deserves to be put in a high traffic area for maximum viewing pleasure. *V. sesquipedalis*, asparagus bean, does equally well in full sun or light shade but does need support of some type. The showy, large, violet flowers are followed by impressively drooping, and edible, pods that may reach 40" in length. If using the beans for food, they are best harvested between 12" and 18". The green pod seeds can also be roasted – does this vine sound like fun to grow or what?

There is so much more to annual vines than morning glories and sweet peas – and while they are both delightful, it is fun to experiment with some unusual plant

material. A couple of reminders though – do be careful when introducing any new plant into your yard. Most of the vines listed here readily produce viable seed for future generations – you may want to control that a bit by not allowing all of them to go unabashedly to seed. At least until you understand how each particular plant's propagation tendency fits into your landscape (or your neighbor's...). The goal of a vine is vertical cover – meaning – they generally grow upwards or outwards, quickly. Again, proceed with caution as you introduce new materials. Make sure you understand the growing habit and any subsequent control measures before things get out of hand. But most of all, include them in your garden, why miss out on the fun doing a bit of easy gardening. Finding an appropriate soil and sun situation, do a bit of soil prep, plant the seeds, weed a bit, mulch a bit, splash some water, if needed, and presto!!!! Cool vines covering things that don't move fast enough to get out the way.