

THE VIRTUES of VINES

Climbers can play many roles in knitting together the border throughout the summer.

(Part 3 in a 4-part series) Christopher Lloyd



A Borderful of Climbers

- A.** Vigorous temporary climber such as *Cobaea scandens* or *Ipomoea* 'Heavenly Blue' onto permanent climbers.
- B.** Two climbers planted together, one flowering earlier than the other.
- C.** Peasticks that support *astroemeria* play host to *Thunbergia alata*.
- D.** Moderate-/low-vigor climber trailing over the ground to take over from early permanent bulbs such as hyacinths.

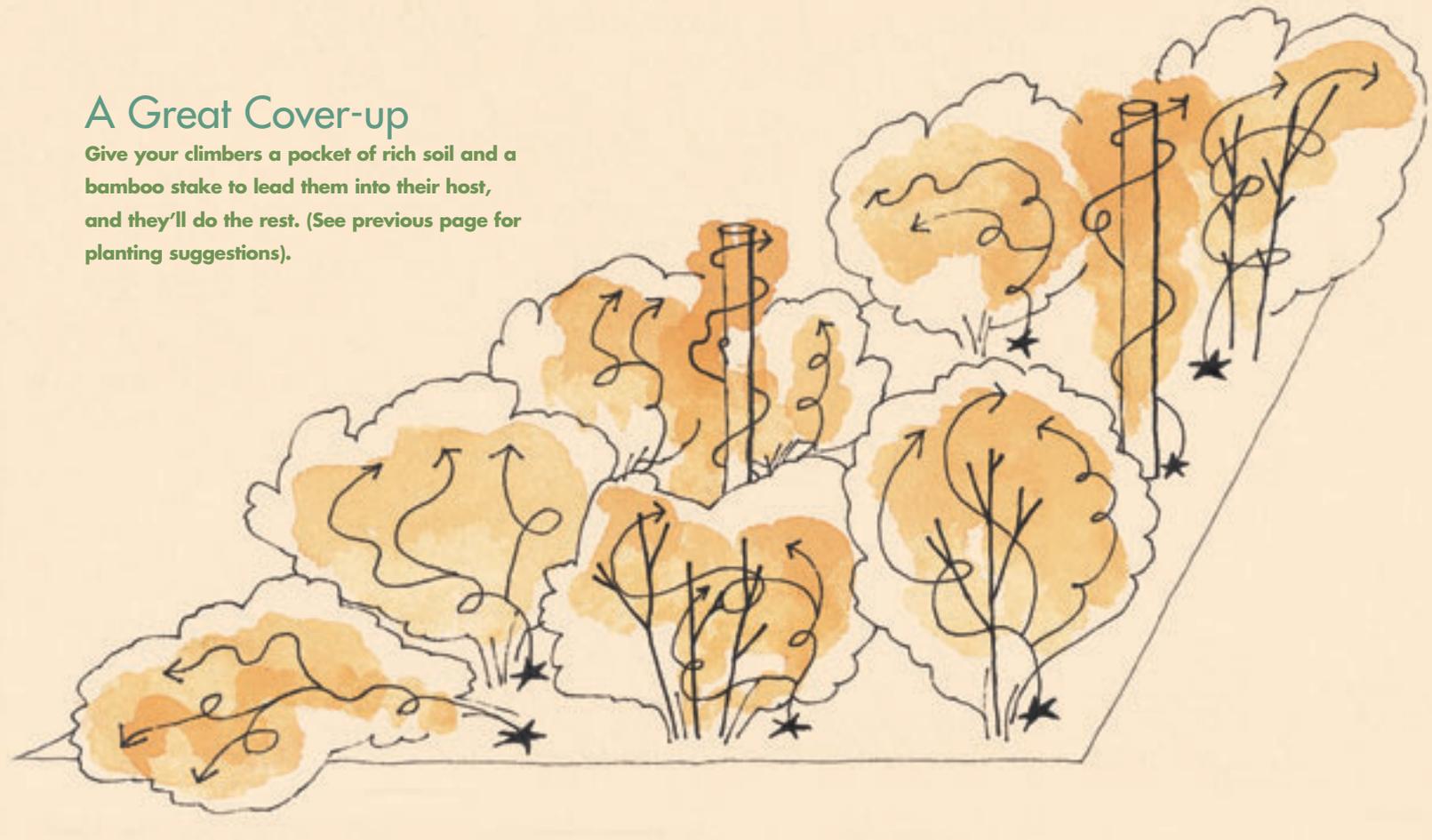
MY GREAT GOAL being to have borders with the longest possible season of interest and beauty, relaxed yet organized, I have in the first two articles of this series discussed perennials of a permanent nature (April–May) and temporary elements, raised off the stage and introduced for display as needed (June–July). But I have said nothing yet about vines.

These are great fillers in the mixed border. Take clematis. If there is a strong-boned shrub in the border,

I immediately ask myself whether it couldn't support one. A shrub's framework is often made strong by regular pruning, so it will become, after a number of years, a suitable vehicle for the weight of a clematis. Mahonias are a good instance (if they are hardy with you—the Oregon grape holly, *M. aquifolium*, is the hardiest, to USDA Zone 6). They have handsome leaves year-round and a prolific flowering season. But that is not quite enough. So, I have one, *M. ×media*

A Great Cover-up

Give your climbers a pocket of rich soil and a bamboo stake to lead them into their host, and they'll do the rest. (See previous page for planting suggestions).



You can extend the display of many trees and shrubs, and even some perennials, without damaging them if you match the vigor of the climber to its host. Poles and fences are another way to work climbers into the garden—adding color and height while using up little room at ground level.

'Buckland', which flowers in December. Because it becomes leggy if left entirely unpruned, I am quite severe about shortening back all its shoots, in spring, every third year or so. At the base of the mahonia I have a plant (I could double up and have two plants) of *Clematis* × *triter-*

nata 'Rubromarginata'. It flowers on its young wood in August, mantling the mahonia with quite tiny, very sweet-scented blossoms. Its growth is not too heavy, and as soon as it has finished, we cut it off the mahonia's foliage, so that the host's good health is not impaired.





Clematis that flower on their current season's growth are the easiest to manage, as they can be pruned back hard at the end of the growing season (or early in the spring) without inhibiting their performance. In another instance I have purple 'Jackmanii

very economical way to enliven a quiet bit of border.

Rather a favorite herbaceous vine, with me, is *Dicentra scandens*. It swings into action quite late and has a roving commission, roaming among Japanese anemones and up into a nearby tamarisk. It carries

The idea with annual vines is to plug them in so as to mask a perennial or shrub that has finished flowering—delphiniums, for instance—whose stems can then support a colorful climber like *Mina lobata* or *Ipomoea* 'Heavenly Blue'.

Superba' growing over a tall privet, *Ligustrum quihoui*, which we prune regularly in early spring, removing old, flowered shoots and leaving the new untouched. The privet flowers in late August, but the clematis growing over it flowers a month or two earlier, so I have a good succession, this time with the clematis filling in at the start of the summer.

clustered lockets of small, yellow blossom and goes well with anything. At the end of the season, it vanishes from sight.

Another way to use this type of clematis in a border is growing vertically up a pole. You can vary the length of the pole according to the vigor of the vine (honeysuckles can be treated in the same way, although their framework is generally more permanent). After a hard pruning in early spring, the clematis's young shoots are tied in as they develop, until they reach the very top of their pole. This results in a solid column of blossom. Scarcely any lateral space is occupied, so you are making use of the third dimension and extending the border's territory into the sky. A

Then there are the annual vines, which we raise from seed. The idea is to plug them in so as to mask a perennial or shrub that has finished flowering—delphiniums, for instance. Having removed their flowered spikes, the stems remain and in front of it Fergus will have planted perhaps a *Mina lobata*, with tubular flowers combining orange, yellow, and white, or a morning glory, *Ipomoea* 'Heavenly Blue', or a particular favorite, *Rhodochiton atrosanguineus*, which has chains of purple lantern flowers. There is always an element of unpredictability in these vines, which may take off in the opposite direction to the one you intended, as when a *Mina lobata* cuddled up to a bright pink phlox. But you can't help smiling, after the initial color shock. ♡