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THE policy of 'love 'em and leave 'em' is one, it sometimes seems to me, that might well be adopted towards certain plants, as well as women. I am thinking especially of clematis. There can be no denying that of all garden climbers the hybrid clematis are the undisputed aristocrats; not for nothing do many of them bear the title of duchess, lady, countess and so on. Indeed there is something almost regal about their big silken crowns of purple, mauve, crimson, lavender and white. Undoubtedly they are the most desirable of all the garden's summer ladies.

And the most fickle. This is, however, not quite fair to them, since in reality they are cursed. Their maddening propensity to collapse and die in full morning glory, prompting my policy of 'love 'em and leave 'em', is really not whimsical. They are the victims of the dreaded clematis wilt, for which, alas, there is yet no known cure. It used to be thought that clematis were prone to disease because they were grafted. But today no clematis are grafted; all are grown from cuttings; and still the plague afflicts them. Until recently its cause was not known; now, it would seem, the cause is known but not the cure. So, every summer, the despairing, mourning ranks of bereaved clematis lovers grow. In the past ten years I must have had 20 or more collapse and wither blackly in their prime; and I can endure it, I fear, no longer.

If your love affair with clematis is, like mine, virtually over, you may care to comfort yourself with some of the plants I shall now describe: all climbers, all beautiful; some easily grown from seed and of rapid growth; some vigorous and hardy; some of dubious hardiness; some tender; and one, *Lapageria rosea* Nash Court from Chile, with its ropes of big, waxen, raspberry-pink bells hanging like some exquisite essay in celestial campanology, even more beautiful than the clematis themselves.

First, a word of warning. If you have a bare or ugly space to cover do not be tempted to plant the Russian Vine, *Polygonum baldschuanicum*; you will forever live to regret acquaintance with this possessive, unbeautiful octopus. *Cobaea scandens*, with its faded lilac cup-and-saucer bells or in its far lovelier white form (though this is almost lemon, rather than white), will grow just as fast and will give greater reward. It will also flower the first summer from seed, as will the various varieties of Morning Glory, *Ipomoea rubro-coerulea praecox*, again rivalling the clematis in their silken aristocracy, and *Eccremocarpus scaber*, with delicate, self-clinging, fern-like foliage and lovely drooping hands of rosy-orange fingers. This is hardy only perhaps by a wall but like the other two, it is so easily raised from seed that there need be no heartbreak about its loss.

Lapageria rosea is not hardy either, except in the mildest southwestern districts; nor is *Abutilon megapotamicum*, though some gardeners may differ about this, but my guess is that you will go mad to have both once you have seen them. The *Abutilon*, not truly a climber, will, however, grow fast enough by a wall to add a yard to its stature in summer; my own method with it is simply to grow it in a large pot and plonk it outside, pot and all, in June. Its fuchsia-like, pendant lanterns in red, yellow and black are quite unlike anything else I know, and it comes with ridicu-

lous ease from cuttings, which flower obligingly when young. The same treatment will serve *Clianthus puniceus*, the lobster-claw or parrot's bill from New Zealand. The common names are self-explanatory and describe the scarlet or pink flowers very well. This too is easily raised from seed.

Of the many varieties of honeysuckle there is little need to speak; all are happy wanderers, many very beautiful. *Solanum crispum* is not so well known and, at least in its common mauve form, hardly deserves to be. But the white form merits its place of honour. It grows fast, flinging over house walls, or climbing roses, its necklaces of white stars, the whole plant tenacious in habit and flower, so that it goes on growing and even flowering until December. Winter may singe it at the tips but spring will restore it. In general effect it looks not unlike the hardest of jasmines, *Jasminum officinale*, long-treasured everywhere for its exquisite fragrance.

Then there are climbers which put all their glory into leaf, such as the monumental *Vitis coignetiae*, with its huge, heart-shaped leaves that positively catch fire in autumn, an indisputable vine whose praises I have sung before. The ivies, *Hedera canariensis variegata* and H. Helix Buttercup and Jubilee, with leaves of silver and white or pure gold, have a positively classical air, especially on old walls or the pillars of pergolas, or even on the stumps of old trees. A few climbers are still more generous, making double offerings or triple ones, of leaf and fruit, or even leaf, fruit and flower.

Some plants will climb when they are not supposed to and some would seem to break their family rules. *Convolvulus mauritanicus* last summer decided to try out its prowess as a climber with me and wound its way upward into the claret towers of *Sedum Autumn Joy*, its pale blue trumpets strung out from the sedum's upper storeys like azure lanterns. It is such a plant as *Tropaeolum spectabile* that seems to break not only the rules but also the hearts of at least English gardeners. This rebel nasturtium does not care for the sunlight and heat demanded by the rest of its family. It revels in damp, cool, shady conditions, on a north aspect, and maddens English gardeners by growing and flowering gloriously in Scotland where its scarlet flowers are no less splendid than the commoner family trumpets flowering in the Mediterranean.

And so to my moment of humility. I am once more with the clematis, cap in hand. Come back, ladies, all is forgiven. You are not all unsocial. I had forgotten those among you who are never sick, never fickle, and never deceivers who deceive. *Clematis alpina* and its close relatives, the *macropetala* varieties restore and uphold the family honour. The earliest of clematis to flower, they sometimes look not at all unlike masses of rich mauve double columbines (one variety in fact called Columbine) and at other times like anemones or a crowd of silky moths (another variety is called White Moth). Their glory may be brief, but glory it is, and is duly followed by silver crowds of seeds looking exactly like the seeds of *Anemone pulsatilla*. What could be lovelier? A crowd of climbing columbines, climbing moths, climbing anemones? Yes, truly, all is forgiven.

H. E. Bates



Climbers, unsocial & others

The well-known novelist writes about how his garden grows