If you've had success with a particular plant in your garden but feel it's time for a change, try a different variety. Martha loves her pink-flowering, climbing Clematis montana var. reubens but decided to try a new clematis whose flower is a different color and blooms later in the season. Clematis viticella 'Etoile Violette,' which means "violet star" in French, was developed in the late 1800s. It has violet-purple flowers with contrasting yellow anthers, blooms from midsummer to early fall, and can grow to a heights of 10 to 15 feet.

Take care when choosing a spot for clematis: The roots need to be kept cool, but the vines should be in full sun. Plant vines in the shade of low shrubs, or create shade with mulch or by planting low-growing annuals and perennials at the base of the plant. Clematis thrives in well-drained, moist soil. If you choose a climbing variety, carefully tie the plant to a trellis with natural jute twine. In late winter or early spring, prune it 1 to 2 1/2 feet above soil level, just above the base of the previous season's stems.

Recommended Reading:

Raymond J. Evison
"The Gardener's Guide to Growing Clematis" (Timber, 1998; $29.95)