

Bell County Master Gardeners
Tip of the Week
By Robin Pohl
“Wisteria—A Vine with an Attitude!”

Wisteria vine is a popular plant here in central Texas known best for its sweet scented purple flowers in early spring. What some homeowners do not know is that the reputation of Wisteria is of an invasive plant! It is no secret that Wisteria can kill off many of your plants but through proper techniques you can enjoy the purple flowers without damaging the rest of your yard and garden.

Wisteria is dangerous because it grows quickly and spreads over other trees and shrubs, eventually choking out the light. It has no limit to how high it can climb or fast it can grow. The parent plant sends out long vines from the top that can reach several feet into the air and then twine onto an adjacent branch of another plant and eventually smother it.

The most important part of Wisteria care is selecting a suitable location. The proper place to plant a Wisteria is in the middle of a yard surrounded by grass where you can mow on all sides around it. Isolated in the middle of a lawn, Wisteria can be shaped into the form of a small tree or shrub. Plan for routine maintenance of the vine by cutting back long tendrils and removing suckers from the base. The vine should be pruned heavily in the fall to control size for the next growing season. Wisteria vines can be planted approximately four feet apart from one another and grow together for a larger hedge-like plant.

Wisteria plants are also useful for covering arbors that are located in open areas and fences that are away from other plants. To ensure sustainable, attractive coverage of the structure the following practices should be used. First, use the primary center vine to twine up the center of the arch or fence. Select side shoots that twine away from the center vine to cover the sides of the structure. Remove all extra shoots that are not needed for even coverage. Remove suckers from the base as soon as they appear. Remember to heavily prune in the fall to control the size of the plant for the spring growing season. Wisteria needs to be closely monitored for the entire growing season to prune extra shoots and also correctly twine vines.

Wisteria is an attractive plant but usually is not a good choice for a low maintenance garden. With proper attention, you can safely use Wisteria to provide an attractive, fragrant feature to your garden in early spring.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask.bcmga@gmail.com