



PHOTO BY BONNIE COURTER

No great mystery to wisteria

Wisteria is a low-care requirement plant, only needing pruned twice a year — summer and winter.

Properly cared for, wisteria is a terrific addition to a garden, but be aware of its less friendly traits, too

Question: I have a beautiful wisteria that I love and want to plant more, but a new acquaintance told me that wisteria is extremely invasive – is this true?

Answer: There are two broad categories of wisteria: Asian and American.

Yes, some types of wisteria can be very invasive and the Asian varieties (from China and Japan) are the most vigorous growers and therefore the most invasive. These include: Chinese wisteria (*Wisteria sinensis*) and Japanese wisterias (*Wisteria floribunda* and *Wisteria brachybotrys*).

The wisterias that are native to the United States have a less-aggressive growth habit, and therefore invasiveness is less of a concern. These include: American wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*) which is a native of the eastern United States and Kentucky wisteria (*Wisteria macrostachya*) native to Kentucky.

It is fairly easy to determine what type of wisteria you have by looking at the blossoms. The Asian varieties have elongated blossoms with loose petals that appear to drip.

On the American varieties,



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the blooms are more compact and the petals shorter and rounder. American wisterias are less aromatic than the Chinese and Japanese varieties.

The Chinese wisteria and the Kentucky wisteria will twine in a counter-clockwise direction while the American wisteria and the Japanese wisteria will twine clockwise. Asian varieties have fuzzy seed pods while the American varieties seed pods are smooth.

Please consider the following pros and cons of planting and managing wisteria:

PROS

- Show-stopping beauty in any garden.
- Profuse blossoms.
- Comes in many colors.
- Requires little to no fertilizing once established.
- Can be trained as a bush, a tree, a screen, or to climb a wall.
- Even for the most invasive

species there are mitigations

- Can be pruned vigorously without fearing damage.

CONS

- If grown from seed it can take 10 or more years to bloom.
- Must be pruned religiously to maintain desired shape and to contain growth. Twice a year is preferable.
- If neglected, wisteria can destroy the trellis or pergola it is growing on.
- If neglected it can wrap around other plants and trees and kill them.
- Seed pods and seeds are toxic if ingested and can cause nausea, vomiting, headache, fever and diarrhea.

If, after reviewing the cons, you still want to grow wisteria the following information will help prevent your wisteria from becoming invasive.

It is easy to see how the low-care requirement of wisteria plants lends to it becoming invasive. Prune wisteria religiously twice a year — summer and winter. In the summer, prune one to two months after it flowers. It is also beneficial to trim (or lightly prune) throughout the summer to eliminate unruly shoots and any suckers.



Get rid of the old wood after blooming is important to contain a wisteria plant. This also will keep the branches from growing and finding other trees and structures to attach to and destroy, like it did here.

Pick up any seed pods.

Wisteria blooms on new wood so getting rid of the old wood after blooming is important to contain it, to train and maintain it in the desired shape and area. This also will keep the branches from growing and finding other trees and structures to attach to and destroy. In winter (or late fall) you will want to prune it vigorously. Remove dying or dead branches, any suckers, any seed pods.

Wisteria is a lovely vine with wonderful fragrant blooms.

You just need be aware that it needs a lot of pruning to contain it.

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.