

I believe a true friend is forever. A true friend not only touches your hand but also your heart. This past weekend, while puttering in our backyard I was visually reminded of an old and true friend who passed away in 2006 but who continues to dwell in my heart. The visual reminder to which I refer is *Clematis terniflora*, more commonly known as sweet autumn clematis.

More than twenty years ago, my friend Marshal Beck and his wife Carole moved away from Minden. For years, prior to them moving away, I admired a particular plant gracing their backyard fence. By late summer/early fall, their fence was ablaze with bloom, and a sweet intoxicating fragrance filled the air. Before they moved, they graciously dug up their plant and gave it to Rita and me as a gift of friendship. This gift has been giving ever since.



Sweet autumn clematis is an herbaceous, easy to grow, deciduous vine that is hardy to USDA Zone 4. Known for its rapid growth, sweet autumn clematis is



capable of reaching thirty feet in one growing season. It grows best in full sun to partial shade. I frequently recommend growing this vine for fences, trellises, arbors or walls due to its rapid cover. It climbs by twisting petioles and twining stems. Not only does this vine do a wonderful job of covering, but at this time of year— from August through early September—the vine is covered with millions of beautiful, highly

fragrant flowers followed by feathery seed heads. The flowers are tiny, snow-white, star-shaped blooms, and after they peak, they blow around the yard like confetti. During their bloom, the air is filled with a mind-blowing fragrance that not only attracts me, but the flowers are visited by a myriad of pollinator insects, all seemingly crazed by the intoxicating scent.

Although considered an herbaceous vine, sometimes during mild winters, the previous season's growth remains viable and continues growing farther in length the following spring. Furthermore, if the vine is allowed to remain intact over the winter, the vine becomes a prolific re-seeder the following spring.

Generally, when our vine finishes blooming, I cut it back to prevent it from going to seed. As mentioned prior, if allowed to produce seed, sweet autumn clematis reseeds easily. I must admit the seed pods themselves are very attractive, and they do create a great food source for birds during the winter months. Occasionally, when I do allow our vine to produce seed, the following spring I find many new seedlings sprouting throughout the yard.

Over the years I have shared many of these volunteers with other friends. As a matter of fact, shortly after Marsh and Carole moved away, I returned a little offspring to them to plant in their new surroundings. I often refer to these little plants as friendship plants. After all, I received the original from friends. I can only imagine with all those other little friendship plants that I've given away, they, too, must be in full bloom, rewarding others with their loveliness. Let them also be a reminder of how valuable friends are as we make our way along the path of life.

Ten to eleven years ago, I allowed one of these little volunteers to grow beneath our lilac shrub. During the summer months, this vine climbs to the top of the shrub, completely covers it, and presently, it too is ablaze. Time and time again, people ask me, "What shrub is blooming in your back yard", and I tell them, "Our lilac." It's fun to witness their bewildered look. Then I explain, "It's a vine."

Today, as our sweet autumn clematis is in full bloom, exquisite and exciting, I am reminded of my true friend forever, Marshal Beck.