

Carolina jasmine, a hardy vine for your garden

Vines are a great way to enhance a garden. They provide a beautiful backdrop to lower growing plants, and they can cover a variety of surfaces and add color and character to an area. Carolina jasmine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), a native vine, is a great way to enhance the looks of most gardens. It adds color to the landscape and the scent the flowers produce is very pleasant.

The evergreen plant is very appealing. The color of the leaves is a rich green and the contrasting yellow flower clusters are extremely attractive and fragrant. The plant blooms from late winter to early spring. When placed in a shady spot, the plant will grow quite aggressively and can climb on trellises, walls, fences and even shrubs and trees. It can reach heights of 20 feet in an effort to reach the sunlight.

When growing in the wild, Carolina jasmine grows along streams, rivers, lowlands and other shady areas. Although the plant seems to like moisture, it is considered drought tolerant. The vine will drop leaves and look somewhat raggedy until adequate moisture is received by the roots, but will continue to live. It will also tolerate very cold temperatures.

Carolina jasmine is a hardy plant and does best when planted where the roots can receive shade but the leaves and stems receive some sun. It is best to place the plant in an area where it won't choke out other nearby vegetation. It is somewhat aggressive and is a typical vine that will grow on nearby objects such as plants.

When planting, keep in mind that the vine can grow 10 to 20 feet tall if supported. If it is left to grow without vertical support, it will form a 3 to 4 foot dense thicket. If height and vertical attractiveness is the goal, it is best to secure young tendrils to structures when planted. This trains future growths to climb trellises, arbors and tree trunks. If a flowing look is desired, the plant will cascade down the sides of pots or containers without vertical support.

The plant can be propagated by seed, cuttings in the spring or it can be air layered. Some popular places for planting are around mail boxes, next to a chain link fence or a trellis. Be careful when choosing the site for the vine because the flowers, leaves and roots of the plant are poisonous and may harm children, livestock and pets. The sap is toxic and when working with the plant, it is important to wear gloves and wash your hands after handling it.

Overall, Carolina jasmine is a great choice for gardeners who want a hardy plant that will either climb with support or flow downward without it. The beautiful yellow blooms will add a splash of color and the dark green leaves will be a great addition to the foliage in the area.

This plant along with many other varieties of native species will be offered at the Air Potato Exchange Day at the Agricultural Center on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010. All you have to do is bring in at least one bag of air potato bulbs and you walk away with a free plant. If you don't know what an

air potato is, don't worry, seminars and workshops will be offered in the fall. For more information on this program, watch for advertisements about the upcoming workshops or call our office at (863) 402-6545.

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