

# VIRGIN'S BOWER, A WILD CLEMATIS

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Virgin's bower flowers

Virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*), with its quaint, old-fashioned name, is a close cousin to the garden clematis. It most closely resembles sweet autumn clematis (*Clematis terniflora* or sometimes mistakenly called *C. paniculata*). Since virgin's bower is a very common resident of Beverly Shores, there is every chance that you have walked past it in various stages of growth and not realized it. It begins blooming in August and continues into early September.

Virgin's bower shows off clusters of up to 30 lightly fragrant one-quarter to one-half inch white flowers in late summer. While there are separate plants with male and female flowers, the good news is that both sexes have showy white flowers. The female flowers have the advantage of producing silver colored feathery plumes containing seeds. These plumes appear in late fall

after blooming and persist for several weeks. Virgin's bower also has attractive compound leaves, each with three leaflets. As an additional benefit, the leaves contain toxins that ward off deer.

Virgin's bower can grow up to 20 feet if given the right conditions and a place to climb. It is also quite happy to clamber over shrubs, dead branches, or other objects. It does best in part sun but grows in just about any amount of light, though in heavy shade or full sun it is unlikely to produce flowers. Virgin's bower also seems to tolerate our dryish, sandy soils or moister soils as evidenced by its ubiquity in town.



Seed-containing Plumes

Virgin's bower is sold by a good number of native plant nurseries and some specialty and large conventional nurseries. But look carefully at the name, particularly the scientific name, to be sure you are getting *Clematis virginiana*. The similar species, sweet autumn clematis (*C. terniflora*), is from northeastern Asia and is a substantially larger and more aggressive vining plant. As a matter of fact, sweet autumn clematis can self-seed in the landscape and escape cultivation. It is especially a problem as an invasive plant in the East and Midwest, so be careful if you choose to plant this non-native species.

The Environmental Restoration Group (ERG) will be glad to help identify plants for you and make suggestions for removal and for native replacements. Don't hesitate to contact Terry Bonace ([tbonace@gmail.com](mailto:tbonace@gmail.com)), Candice Smith ([csmith2@uemail.iu.edu](mailto:csmith2@uemail.iu.edu)), or Bill Schaudt ([bschaudt2@gmail.com](mailto:bschaudt2@gmail.com)) for assistance. Also please visit our website at [www.bserg.org](http://www.bserg.org) for further information on invasive plants and native replacements.