



Greening a house wall - the basics of cultivating climbing plants

Fully cover the façade with plants ?

Fully greening the facade of a building brings great ecological value - and it's easy with self-climbing plants such as ivy or a virginia creeper. The summer-microclimate is better around vegetation: leaves capture dust, temperatures are lower and air humidity is higher due to evapotranspiration in the leaves. Birds and insects also get an habitat they would otherwise miss in the city. Less-liked architectural elements, like noise barriers or grid-walls can be "hidden" with by the leaves of self-climbing plants and twiners. Choosing the right plant for the place is also most crucial for success. Keep in mind that all residents should have a say when a greening project is considered, or they might be irritated by the proximity of insects and the ever smaller windows slowly engulfed by vegetation. Birds chirping for hours on the branches near the window can be annoying in the long run... And depending on the plant there could be a lot of dead leaves to dispose of in autumn.

Partial greening of the façade

For the architectural impression of the building it is often better to only cover smaller areas with vegetation, so that important shapes can be highlighted by interesting contrasts between the building and the plant. This works well with grape-vines (see picture above), as well as climbing roses, clematis, winter jasmine and a lot of others that need a supporting structure to climb and will stay in their assigned space. Several twining climbers can grow on railing, fences, masts, balcony pillars and other structures without needing extra support.

Damage caused by the plants

Damage to buildings by climbing plants is a hard topic that has often been controversial. Very fast growing twiners, such as wisteria, knotweed or celastus, and plants whose branches flee from light and infiltrate every crevice and gap (ivy and virginia creeper) are the main suspects. With "good behavior" plants like a clematis, a climbing rose or a grapevine, there are no such dangers. Hops is also a good alternative: its leaves develop very early in spring and are shed by autumn; no danger from massive trunks here.

Visual impact - near of from afar?

Do you prefer an harmonious impression when the building is looked at from afar, or do you want to admire the shapes and colors of leaves and flowers, and maybe even smell them from very near? Are both important? It often depends on the building: with a wall that's only going to be looked at from distance, the general view might count more. For a bush planted near patio or a portal you'll want to consider another range of plants. Keep in mind that fading flowers aren't always a pretty sight, and you should be aware of how the plant will look after losing its leaves.

Evergreen foliage

The most-desired characteristic for climbing plants is often evergreen foliage, but it is hard to combine with an ideal flower and its fruits. Besides ivy there's the evergreen honeysuckle, the wintercreeper or the firethorn (beautiful berries!) to choose amongst, as well as some cotoneasters. Sometimes a semi-evergreen plant is sufficient, reducing the leafless season from 4-5 to 1-3 months. An akebia and more importantly the resistant and beautifully flowering climbing-roses can be considered here. But all these plants always need damp soil even in the winter!

Support-trellis and Wall-surface

Supports for climbing plants can be made of wood, plastic, metal, textiles and take the form of rods, cables or grids. There's a wide selection of pre-made supports available in construction or garden markets. Mounting the support on the wall is often the most difficult point, especially with face masonry, wall panelings or ETICS-systems. For those, stainless-steel special solutions are available online. Material costs can vary between 5,- and 100,- euros per square meter for the more difficult projects.