Carolina Jessamine

Carolina jessamine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*) is one of the most beautiful vines of the South. It covers fences and trees in open woodlands and along roadways throughout the Southeast with its slender vines and bright yellow flowers. It is the state flower of South Carolina.

**Mature Height/Spread**
Carolina jessamine grows to 20 feet or more when grown as a vine. It can also be grown as a ground cover, maintained with a yearly cutting in late spring after flowering to 3 feet or less.

**Growth Rate**
This vine's growth rate is moderate, growing rapidly once established or with rich soil and adequate water.

**Ornamental Features**
Sweetly scented, golden yellow flowers cover the cascading, fine textured foliage from February to April. The trumpet-shaped blooms have 5 lobes, are 1 to 1½ inches long, and are attractive to both butterflies and bumblebees. The shiny evergreen leaves are 1 to 3 inches long on 10-to-20-foot tall vines.

**Landscape Use**
Carolina jessamine is easy to grow. It is attractive on an arbor where the slender branches hung with yellow flowers can be seen from below. This plant will stay in scale and can be used on decks and porches and near patios and entryways. It is good in containers and as a ground cover along steep banks to help control erosion.

Carolina jessamine tolerates either full sun or partial shade. Flowering is more prolific and foliage growth is denser in full sun.

This vine is very adaptable and will grow in a variety of conditions. For best results, plant it in rich, well-drained soil. Moist soil is ideal, but the vine is able to withstand periods of drought once established. Carolina jessamine grows well in USDA Zones 6 to 9.

Plant from containers during cool fall weather; space plants 3 feet apart as a ground cover, and 4 to 8 feet apart for fence or trellis climbers.

Fertilize while the plant is actively growing with moderate amounts of a slow-release, balanced fertilizer, such as a 12-6-6. Do not overfeed, since excessive fertilizer can reduce flowering.

Older vines that become top heavy or sparse can be pruned back to a few feet above ground level after flowering. Remove dead or broken branches and shape the plant each year after bloom. Mow groundcovers every few years to maintain density.
Cultivars & Related Species

- **'Pride of Augusta':** This is a popular double-flowered cultivar that stays in bloom longer than the species. The flowers are very attractive at close range, and look like miniature roses. This cultivar may also be listed as 'Plena'.

- **'Margarita':** This cultivar has slightly larger & more prominent flowers, and is more cold hardy than the species.

- **'Pale Yellow':** May also be listed as 'Woodlander's Pale Yellow' or 'Woodlander's Light Yellow'. The flowers are creamy-yellow and larger than the species. This cultivar is not as cold hardy, and is best grown in USDA Zone 8 and southward.

- **Butterscotch™:** This cultivar flowers 2 to 3 weeks later than the species and repeat blooms in the fall.

- **Lemon Drop™ (‘Conrop’; PP11956):** This vine is more compact with shrub-like habit and with softer yellow flowers.

Swamp jessamine (*Gelsemium rankanii*), also known as Rankin's jessamine, is a native southeastern species. Unlike Carolina jessamine, it flowers heavily both in fall as well as in spring. Flowers may even appear sporadically during warmer days of winter. This species has yellow flowers that are identical to the Carolina jessamine, but the flowers are not fragrant. Swamp jessamine will tolerate periods of water-logged soils, but once established is also a very drought tolerant plant. It grows best in USDA Zones 7 to 9.

### Problems

All parts of this plant are very poisonous. The sap may cause skin irritation in sensitive individuals. Children can be poisoned by sucking the nectar from the flowers. Insects or diseases are rarely a problem on Carolina jessamine. Deer and rabbits will not eat it.

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