

Travellers' Joy

Clematis (the wild variety, *Clematis vitalba*, is known as 'travellers' joy'), is a delightful motif and can be incorporated into broad natural history studies, or worked alone as a delicate and ethereal subject. In this simple project, which I have created especially for *STITCH* magazine, a few basic techniques re-create one of autumn's loveliest sights: the cotton-boll seedheads of clematis flowers, their bracts now fallen, each long 'tail' ready to catch the wind and bear its precious seed to pastures new.

The technique of 'floating embroidery' perfectly suggests the downy, flyaway qualities of these seedheads. I first used this technique in one of my early books, *The Embroiderer's Country Album*, and over the years I have used it to create underwater features, tropical plants, feathers and the gossamer of tattered spiders' webs – in fact a whole panoply of fine, mobile motifs.

What you need

- ◆ A fine, plain weave poly/cotton background fabric 28 x 38 cm
 - ◆ Threads:
 - Black
 - Reddish-brown
 - Leaf green
 - Gold green
 - Very pale green
- Any fine thread is acceptable, but the finer the better, especially for the seedheads. If you are working in stranded cotton, use a single

strand throughout. If silk is used, work the main elements of the design in a gauge roughly equal to a single strand of stranded cotton, and the floating seedheads in a finer gauge.

- ◆ Embroidery needles – sizes 8 to 10 are ideal
- ◆ Small, sharp scissors
- ◆ An unsharpened pencil (optional)
- ◆ 30 cm embroidery hoop

Preparation

- 1 Transfer the outline of the design onto your fabric (see Back to Basics page 48). Do not transfer the sweeping lines of the seedheads, simply indicate the extremities of each motif by transferring light dots onto your fabric, as shown.
- 2 Mount your design in an embroidery hoop large enough to accommodate the whole of the motif, leaving a good margin of fabric around the design.

What you do

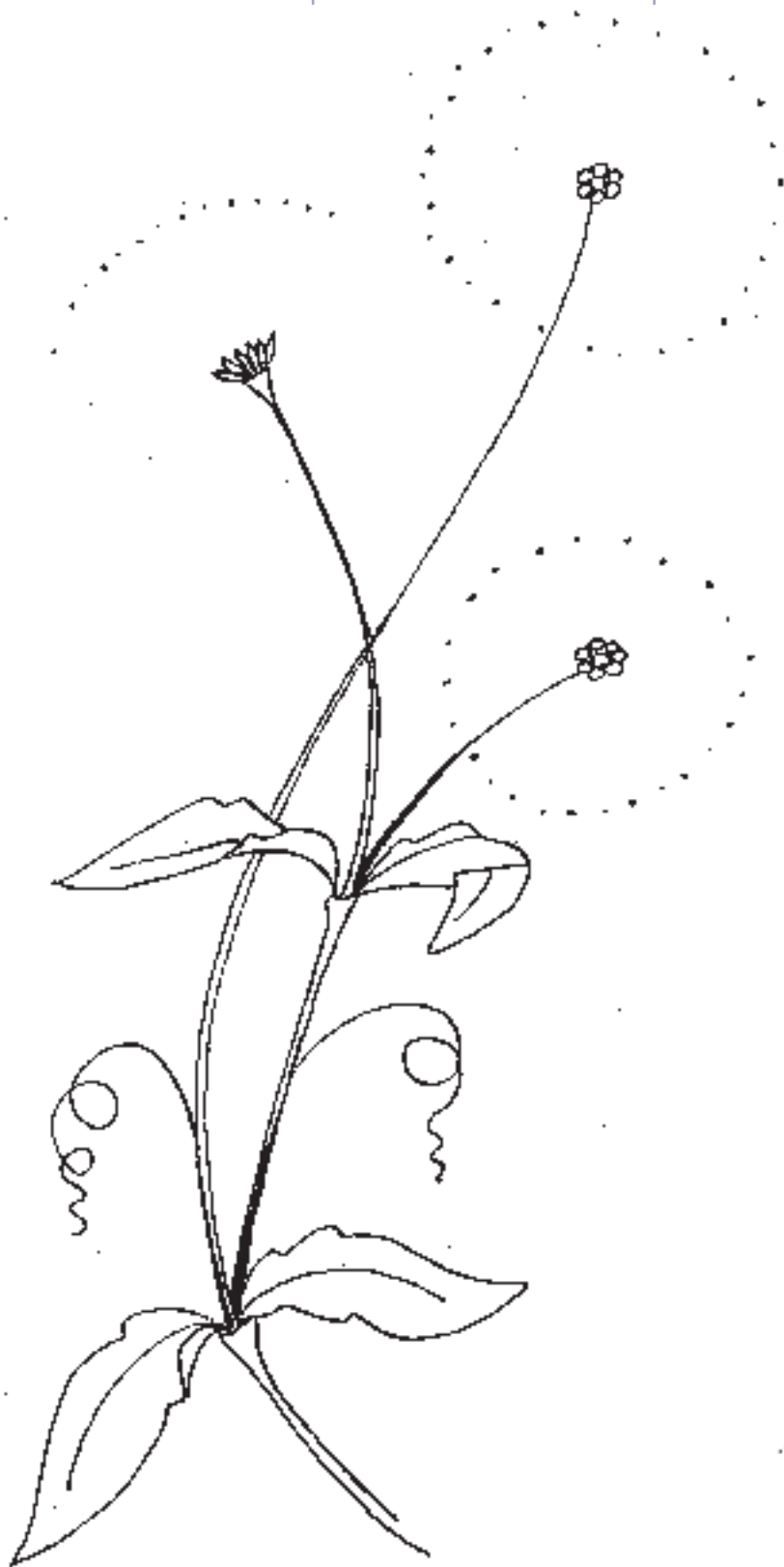
Refer to the colour photograph of the finished embroidery at all times to check the stitch direction. The chart and chart key give details of colour placement. Start stitching with a waste knot (see Back to Basics page 48). To finish, weave the thread through the last few worked stitches and snip off.

The long, sinuous stems and downy delicacy of the seedheads make Helen M. Stevens' study of wild clematis a 'joy' to embroider

PHOTOS BY IAN COLE

Finished size (stitched area):
12 x 22 cm





Colour references:

- 1 Black
- 2 Reddish-brown
- 3 Leaf green
- 4 Gold green
- 5 Very pale green



- 1 In black (1), work the shadow line on the underside of each element of the design in fine stem stitch.
- 2 In reddish-brown (2), work the stems and central leaf veins in graduating and reflexing stem stitch, as appropriate.
- 3 Work the tendrils in the same way. If you have a

choice of thread gauges, use the finest at the tip of each tendril and increase the thickness of the thread as your graduating stem stitch expands.

- 4 Work the leaves in swathes of directional 'opus plumarium' in leaf green (3), gold green (4) and very pale green (5).
- 5 Create the seeds at the base of the seedheads by

working small, tightly abutting straight stitches to form small lozenges (left-hand head) or discs in gold green (4).

- 6 The seeds are then over-stitched in 'floating embroidery' in very pale green (5) to create the effect of the long, wispy tails.

To finish

Stretch and lace your embroidery on a rigid backing board (see Back to Basics page 48). Ensure that when framed a window mount keeps the glass away from the stitching – this will allow the 'floating embroidery' to stand proud of the fabric and create a three-dimensional effect.

Stitches used:

Opus plumarium

This literally means 'feather work', and emulates the way the filaments of feathers lie smoothly, yet with infinite changes of direction. The angle of the stitches sweeps around without breaking the flow of the stitching.

Stem stitch

Always work from the outer extremity of the line, e.g. the fine end of the tendrils. Work with the curve of the subject, bringing the needle out just to the outside of the curve and inserting it on the inside of the curve.

Fine/narrow stem stitch – overlap the stitches by only a small proportion of the stitch length to create a line only the width of a single stitch.

Graduating stem stitch – begin with fine stem stitch, gradually increasing the overlap to a half and then three-quarters ratio to create a gradually thickening line.

Reflexing stem stitch – work fine or graduating stem stitch as required until the direction of the curve begins to change. Take a single straight stitch through the preceding stitch directly along the design line. Continue stem stitch, bringing the needle up on the new outside of the curve.

If you have enjoyed this project, there are many more in *Embroidered Flowers* and its companion volume, the next in the Masterclass series, *Helen M. Stevens' Embroidered Butterflies*, published this autumn by David and Charles, price £19.99. All of Helen's books are available by post from the Embroiderers' Guild Bookshop (see Book reviews page 36).

The Masterclasses come to life at the Manor House Museum, Suffolk, where Helen holds tutorials, exhibitions, etc. For details call Pam Crossley on 01284 757072. For more details on all aspects of Helen's work, visit her website at www.helenmstevens.co.uk

Supplier

A pack of the floss silks for this project costs £4.90 (price includes packing and postage). Each pack comprises five colours: Black, Rhubarb, Pale Leaf, Moss and Sycamore (80 metres of each colour).

Please send a cheque/postal order to: Pipers Silks, Chinnerys, Egremont Street, Glemsford, Suffolk CO10 7SA. Tel/fax: 01787 280920. To view Helen M. Stevens' Pure Silk Embroidery Kits and Pipers Silks, visit the website on www.pipers-silks.com

Floating embroidery

This allows the threads to lie loosely on the fabric, falling into spontaneous shapes.

Take a long stitch from the inside to the outside of the motif, putting a finger or pencil under the thread to keep it away from the fabric (use the blunt end of the pencil, or an unsharpened pencil, in order not to mark your fabric). Take a very small stitch at the outer point of the motif to bring the thread back to the surface. Take a third stitch back to the core of the motif, again keeping a finger or pencil beneath the thread. Repeat the process, removing the finger or pencil when several strands have built up. Continue until each motif is complete.