

Kiwi Vines (*Actinidia kolomitka*) by Gillian Boyd, Ottawa-Carleton master gardener

In 1993 I put up an arbour and planted a kiwi vine at each end. *Actinidia kolomitka* is dioecious so both male and female plants are necessary for fruit. The female vine grew much more slowly than the male which threw out wild stems in all directions and needed very firm training over the arbour. Although the male flowered the following year, it took three years before they both flowered



together and I saw any fruit.

After the male vine matures, it begins to produce pink and white splashed leaves amongst the green foliage and many people grow the male vines just for their colourful foliage. The apple blossom flowers cluster under the leaves and have creamy white petals and golden stamens. The fruit is grape-sized with smooth green skin and until each one is ripe, it remains very hard and firmly attached. It is not worth trying to harvest enough over a few days to provide a bowlful since the fruits become mushy and tasteless when refrigerated. They are best enjoyed fresh off the vine to revive the flagging gardener or share with a visiting friend. The flavour is the same as the larger fuzzy brown fruit of *Actinidia chinensis*.

Kiwi vines are not fussy and will grow in sun or part shade in average soil. Flowers are produced on ripe wood. The vines produce strong stems through the summer and I either train them, cut them back or take them off the old wood. I have had fruit every year except the year after I had to reduce the heavy top growth. The vines get some leaf and compost mulch in the fall but otherwise no special treatment. They are hardy to zone 3 and appear to be impervious to pests and diseases. I have had occasional leaf scorch in very hot summers.

Squirrels and birds take some fruit but are not a nuisance. The main problem in the last three years has been racoons. They consume the unripe fruit and damage the stems and foliage in their greed and determination. I was only able to drive off the first one I saw feasting by hitting it as hard as I could with a heavy shovel. The racoon climbed down and left very reluctantly. I now net the top of the arbour. Racoons still climb up but find it harder to reach the fruit which hangs down below.