

PURE PASSION

Although most *Passiflora* are tender glasshouse climbers, enthusiasts are developing more hybrids that can survive winter outdoors, as Phil Clayton learns. Photography by Myles Irvine

PASSIFLOWERS ARE AMONG the most spectacular of climbers, with flowers of incredible intricacy. Most, however, are tender: *Passiflora caerulea* and its cream-flowered selection 'Constance Elliott' have long been popular in the UK, but until recently few other hardy selections were available. Now, a few breeders have been extending the range available to gardeners, developing hardy, usually semi-evergreen selections as magnificent as the hothouse species and hybrids that many gardeners admire and long to grow.

Gym owner Myles Irvine (right) is just one such enthusiast. He has been growing passionflowers for more than 20 years, most in the shared garden of his flat in Surbiton, Surrey. The back of the flats faces south – which is ideal for passionflowers – and some 30 to 40 of them, many of which he has bred, grow here. Myles' interest was ignited by an article about John Vanderplank, who holds a National Plant Collection of *Passiflora*. He ordered several plants to try: 'Some were rather inappropriate, such as tender *P. quadrangularis*, which reaches up to 46m (151ft) in its South American home. It was soon racing round my kitchen!'

But Myles' interest grew: he began a website which now runs to more than

1,000 pages (see panel, p611); then, encouraged by other enthusiasts such as *Passiflora* cultivar registrar, Les King, he began dabbling with breeding, making his first introduction in 2002. Hardy *P.* 'Star of Surbiton' has white flowers, featuring an appealing halo of blue filaments. Others followed: *P.* 'Betty Myles Young' (raised in 2005 and named after his mother) he rates as his best yet. It is polyploid (the cells contain extra sets of chromosomes), which accounts for its characteristics: large, purple flowers up to 12cm (5in) across from March to December on a vigorous, usually evergreen plant, hardy to at least -8°C (18°F). This, and other plants, he keeps within bounds by pruning in spring.

Myles is humble about his efforts: 'Most of what I grow ends up on the compost heap, but I have been lucky with much of what I have raised.' Lucky or not, his spectacular plants speak for themselves, and there will surely be more to come as his breeding work continues. The new crosses he is currently trialling will, he hopes, prove even tougher and more strikingly beautiful than ever. ■

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PASSIFLORA 'BETTY MYLES YOUNG'

Passionflower breeder Myles Irvine rates this as his best hybrid. Flowering from March to December, with near-evergreen foliage, it can reach 3.5m tall by 6–9m (12ft x 20–30ft). In summer, mature plants produce up to 40 flowers a day, each about 12cm (5in) across. Growers report it survived the winter of 2009–2010 better than any other passionflower, tolerating prolonged spells of at least -8°C (18°F).

PLANTSPROFILE



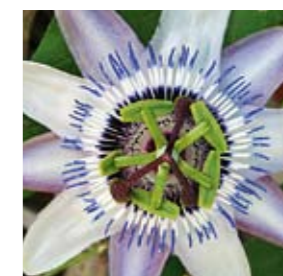
'STAR OF SURBITON'

Ideal for a sunny wall; its flowers appear from June to December, reaching 11.5cm (4½in) across with reflexed petals. Hardy to -8°C (18°F). One parent is *P.* 'Star of Bristol', raised by John Vanderplank.



'MINI LAMB'

A free-flowering, compact selection which grows best in lightly shaded conditions. Hardy to around -5°C (23°F). The brightly coloured flowers reach 8cm (3in) across with reflexed sepals and appear between May and December.



'LAMBIEKINS'

Vigorous polyploid selection (up to 3.5m/12ft in height), hardy to -8°C (18°F), with lightly scented blooms 11.5cm (4½in) across, May to December. Flowers open for several days; decorative yellow-orange fruit may also appear.



'JUSTINE LYONS'

A sister seedling of 'Star of Surbiton', hardy to -8°C (18°F). Vigorous (3.5m/12ft in height by 2.5m/8ft wide) with large, lush foliage; large lilac flowers 12cm (5in) across appear from May into December, in a mild season.



'POPPET'

Raised in 2008, this is one of Myles' favourites. Hardy to around -5°C (23°F), it freely produces reflexed, lightly scented, pastel coloured flowers of up to 10cm (4in) across between June and November. Grows best in full sun.

i Further reading For more about passionflowers, visit Myles Irvine's website: www.passionflow.co.uk. He has also written an article in the September issue of *The Plantsman* (sister publication to *The Garden*). To subscribe, call 020 7821 3401, or visit www.rhs.org.uk/plantsman

• **Suppliers** Most plants mentioned here are available from nurseries listed in the *RHS Plant Finder 2010–2011*