

There are about 600 known species in the genus *Passiflora*. Most are climbing vines, some are tiny, others huge such as tropical *P. quadrangularis* AGM which will scramble 46m (150ft) to the top of the jungle canopy. A few are trees. Most species are native to South America, found from the Amazonian jungle through high-altitude cloud forest to the mountains of the Andes. There are also species native to North America, Asia, Australia and New Zealand, and passionflowers are widely cultivated in gardens around the world for their often spectacular flowers, some with intoxicating exotic perfumes.

Passionflowers acquired their name, not from the passion of love as some may hope, but from *flos passionis*, the flower of the Easter Passion, which refers to Christ's suffering and crucifixion. The structure of the flowers was thought to represent various elements of the crucifixion. The five petals and five sepals are the 10 disciples (less Judas and Peter); the corona filaments, the crown of thorns; five stamens with anthers match the five sacred wounds; and the three stigma are the nails.

Questions of hardiness

Hardiness is always a relative term with *Passiflora*, compared to, for example, much tougher *Clematis*. That said, I have many magnificent passionflowers in my Surrey garden that come back year after year. The key is ground preparation and location.

Of 700 cultivars recorded by the *Passiflora* Cultivar Registrar in 2010, few are hardy, although *Passiflora* x *violacea* AGM (syn. *P. caerulearacemosa*) – the first



The large flowers of *Passiflora caerulea* 'Clear Sky' (above), with their showy dark centres, demand attention. Pure white *P. 'Snow Queen'* (right) produces masses of large, sweetly scented flowers that show up well against the foliage.



cultivar, raised in 1822 – takes -4°C (25°F). It has red-purple flowers to 12cm (5in) across and deep violet coronal filaments with white tips; worth a try in the most sheltered sites.

Best for planting outdoors

The passionflowers listed below should be hardy to around -8°C (18°F). All are vigorous and flower freely from May to November. They can be pruned back hard in spring after frost risk is past, but always leave a few long stems. Four of these passionflowers are polyploid: rather than the usual two sets of chromosomes (diploid) these four selections have either three or four sets. Polyploid plants often have greater vigour, improved hardiness and sturdier flowers that stay open longer than those of diploid plants. *Passiflora* 'Betty Myles Young': named after my mother, this beautiful polyploid cross between *P. caerulea* 'Clear Sky' x *P. loefgrenii* 'Iporanga' produces flowers 12cm (5in) across. It has strongly reflexed lilac petals and sepals, a deep maroon

corona, and filaments banded white and blue. It sets large yellow-orange fruit if *P. caerulea* is nearby. *Passiflora caerulea* AGM: the common blue and white passionflower; always a great choice, widely available, with showy orange fruit late in the year. *P. caerulea* 'Clear Sky': developed by Roland Fischer, this is a magnificent polyploid selection of *P. caerulea* with a little bit of *P. amethystina* thrown in, too, which gives each flower a showy dark centre. *P. 'Damsel's Delight'*: I originally named this 'Silly Cow' in honour of my friend Jana-Marie Štípská. While she approved, many didn't, hence the new name. Polyploid; flowers 12cm (5in) or more across, white petals and sepals tinged lilac, and strong, wavy, banded, purple corona filaments with a striking dark centre make for a great garden plant. *P. 'Snow Queen'*: named after my friend Natalia Walaszek, I bred this pure white polyploid cultivar specifically as a replacement for the lovely old white-flowered English hybrid *P. caerulea* 'Constance Elliott' AGM, first selected in 1879.



With its large flowers *Passiflora* 'Damsel's Delight' (left) is well worth seeking out. Superlative purple-flowered *Passiflora* 'Betty Myles Young' (far left) is a great climber for a sunny, sheltered wall. When happy it will bloom profusely all summer.

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Growing *Passiflora*

All hardy passionflowers love a dry location with full sun, ideally a south-facing place against a brick wall or fence, supported on a trellis or wires. An obelisk, or a tripod of canes will also do. They grow well in almost any free-draining soil, but benefit greatly from sharp sand, grit or even rubble dug in prior to planting.

Passionflowers are greedy feeders; I add compost when planting, and scatter pelleted chicken manure and apply liquid feed once they are established. For their first winter even the hardiest benefit from mulch or straw at the base.

The holy grail of passionflower breeders is to produce a red or even pink-flowered hardy decorative cultivar, or even a hardy passionflower patio plant that will produce edible tasty fruit in UK gardens. Work on this is being led by Salvatore La Delfa, based in Bedford. With a bit of luck we may soon have a wider range of hardy *Passiflora* to find space for on our walls and fences. ●

Resources

Most plants mentioned here are listed in *RHS Plant Finder 2020* and online at rhs.org.uk/findaplant

Hardier *Passiflora*

PLANTS THAT EXCITE The captivating flowers of *Passiflora* make them desirable plants, especially given an increasing range of fairly hardy selections

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