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

**PASSIFLORA 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 hardly 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 flat 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 dabbling with breeding, encouraged by other enthusiasts such as _Passiflora_ cultivar registrar, Les King, who began 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 should prove even tougher and more strikingly beautiful than ever.

Phil Clayton is Features Editor for _The Garden_.