



passionfruit for pavlova

Nothing pairs with pavlova like tangy exotic passionfruit. Shame, then, that these subtropical vines can be such prima donnas. Luckily Lynda Hallinan has found the solution

Whenever my friend Lisa needs a favour, she plays her trump card: "I'll give you a bag of passionfruit if you'll do it." Her bribery never fails, for Lisa is well aware just how much I adore this tangy, exotic fruit. She's also well aware that, over the past five years, every glossy-leaved passionfruit vine I planted in my city garden promptly curled up its tendrils and died. My first vine succumbed to root rot during a vile winter, three were eaten to stumps by slobbering snails and the fifth struggled valiantly for two seasons before being knocked off by a surprisingly hard frost.

It's Murphy's Law of Gardening: the more you want it, the less likely it is that you can grow it. But I've got news for Lisa. Our passionfruit-for-pavlova arrangement – I give her free eggs from our chooks in return for bags of fruit – is over. Because so is my passionfruit drought. The grafted vine I'm training over the stables in my new country garden is going great guns.

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Passionfruit can be prima donnas. They need full sun, free-draining soil, ample water and a supersized diet. Give them manure by the bucketload (they're known in the trade as "gross feeders") and mulch with compost to keep their roots cool.

Watch out for pests and diseases too. Fungal and bacterial issues include grease spot, septoria blotch and brown spot; you may need to spray your vines with copper. The wretched passionvine hopper, in both its juvenile fluffy-bum stage and as a jumpy winged adult, makes rather a nuisance of itself too. I'm yet to find an effective way to kill these blighters, as they leap out of the way as soon as you get anywhere near them with a spray bottle. I resort to blasting them off with the hose, to make myself feel better if nout else.

Determined to break my passionfruit jinx, last year I bought a grafted vine from West Auckland nurseryman Chris Davidson (he featured in the October 2009 issue of *NZ Gardener*).

Chris, who used to grow passionfruit commercially, came up with the clever idea of grafting his best early and late purple varieties, as well as the yellow Fijian jungle passionfruit, onto the vigorous, disease-resistant rootstock of their cousin the sweet granadilla (*Passiflora ligularis*). The result? Turbo-charged passionfruit vines that grow – and fruit – at twice the speed of their non-grafted mates.

I planted my grafted vine last spring, having left it in its planter bag under the stable eaves to wait out winter. We get chilling frosts in Hunua and young vines are particularly susceptible, though established plants are surprisingly hardy.

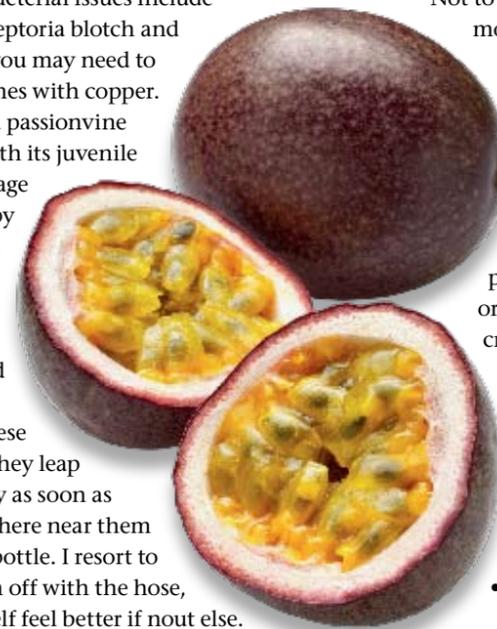
By summer, my vine was laden with fat fruit – or at least it was until the Hunk

held his stag do on the farm. I came home the next day to find a mountain of empty beer bottles, a very green-around-the-gills fiancé and half the unripe fruit off my passionfruit vine littering the ground. At some point during the proceedings, the blokes had taken to pelting each other with them. Yes, boys will be boys.

Not to worry. There's plenty more to come – at least 100 fruit at last count – and my vine is still producing flowers.

Luckily, I could never tire of eating passionfruit. It's my favourite topping for pavlova (and meringues) or cheesecake, or fold into creamy mascarpone and sprinkle with crushed gingernuts. When citrus season is over, I also make jars of passionfruit curd to spread on pancakes instead of lemon honey.

• For Chris Davidson's details, see page 112. 🍷



Top crops

• **PLUMS:** It's going to be a bumper jam season. My five 'Damson' plum trees have been in the ground for two seasons. Last summer I picked a dozen plums – enough for a single jar of jam – but this year one of the trees is smothered in fruit. (Oddly, it's the tree that has to fend for itself when it comes to irrigation. Planted at the far end of the row, it's out of reach of the hose.)

• **GRAPES:** I'll be making up excuses to check on the tenants in my city garden next month, as the grape vines I trained around the front boundary fence are laden with big bunches of fruit. Last year I didn't get to eat a single grape from the 'Niagara' vine, as I forgot that I'd planted green grapes as well as purple 'Albany Surprise' (both from Incredible Edibles). While I waited for the grapes to change colour, the birds got in and scooped the lot. Which reminds me, it's time to net them. And a tip: the fungal disease botrytis can show its ugly face about now. It causes grapes to shrivel as they ripen, so remove excess leaf growth to improve air flow.

• **SUNFLOWERS:** The far end of my lawn looks like a small slice of Provence, with scores of sunflowers in mahogany hues. I sowed whole packets of 'Evening Sun', 'Moulin Rouge' and 'Bohemian Rhapsody' (all from Kings Seeds).

• **HOPS:** I'll sleep easy on homemade hop pillows, all going to plan, as my three new hop vines are almost at roof height.

Flop crops

• **WATERMELONS:** Ah well, you can't win them all. I pampered my plants, allocating them the sunniest spot on the bank, with fertile soil, heaps of compost and oodles of liquid fertiliser, but still, there's not a melon to be seen.

