

## SPOTLIGHT



# Passion fruit cocktail

Getting passionate about exotic fruit will quite literally lead you down the garden path – straight into the polytunnel. **Paul Peacock** enthuses about some tropical delights

If you're looking for a challenge, try passion fruit. It's fairly easy to grow, bearing spectacular flowers, but it's hard to get it to fruit and, even if you succeed, you have to take care because some varieties contain cyanide when unripe. Fortunately, the poisonous fruit taste awful! So why am I raving about it? Well, there are some times when you just have to get really passionate about something.

*Passiflora edulis* is a fast-growing, climbing shrub that'll reach five metres if allowed to. It holds itself in place by means of tendrils, and flowers in this country from June to August. The flowers are famous, being used to illustrate the Passion of Christ by missionaries in South America,

where the plant originates.

It'll grow on any soil as long as it's well-drained and fairly



## HABIT BOX

## Passion fruit Vital statistics

<b>Habit</b>	<b>Twining climber</b>
<b>Height</b>	<b>Up to 10 metres</b>
<b>Spread</b>	<b>Decided by pruning</b>
<b>Foliage</b>	<b>Semi-deciduous</b>
<b>Soil type</b>	<b>Well-draining</b>
<b>Position</b>	<b>Sun</b>
<b>Min temp</b>	<b>15°C</b>
<b>Pruning</b>	<b>As required by simple cutting back</b>
<b>Flowering</b>	<b>June-August</b>
<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Ripe from late summer</b>

nutrient-rich. But it won't tolerate shade at all, and to get it to fruit it needs to be grown in the tunnel – although it will grow outside quite successfully in the south of the country. The varieties with edible fruit include *P. edulis*, *P. incarnata* and *P. vitifolia* so if you stick to these you should be alright. You can buy seeds quite readily in the UK, and they



## HABIT BOX

### Mango Vital statistics

<b>Habit</b>	<b>Large tree</b>
<b>Height</b>	<b>Naturally 35-40m, 2m if controlled</b>
<b>Spread</b>	<b>Decided by pruning</b>
<b>Foliage</b>	<b>Deciduous</b>
<b>Soil type</b>	<b>Well-draining</b>
<b>Position</b>	<b>Sunny</b>
<b>Min temp</b>	<b>12°C</b>
<b>Pruning</b>	<b>Pinch-out buds to create the plant you require</b>
<b>Flowering</b>	<b>June-August</b>
<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Ripe from late summer</b>

need to be sown under heat in late winter; January is a good time. Some growers advise soaking the seeds, others don't bother. They germinate in a month and grow quite quickly. By June they can be transplanted to their growing position in the tunnel. A framework of wires against the end wall is a good place, so long as it's sunny.

Each spring give the plant a good mulch of compost and feed during the summer – tomato feed is as good as any. When the fruit fall off the plant they're ripe. You can cut the branches back once the plant threatens to hit the roof!

### Pleasures of the mango flesh!

Another passionate plant, this time from India, the mango is great fun and easy to grow. It must be kept in temperatures higher than 12°C, and demands little more than some good, old-fashioned TLC.

Mango is the most popular fruit in the world, with more being eaten year-on-year. There are 1,000 varieties and it's been cultivated for over 4,000 years.

It's interesting that the supply of mango seed for growers in the UK has suddenly dried up, with very few outlets offering them for sale. No matter, you can get them from the supermarket.

Take your shop-bought fruit, cut out the seed and enjoy the flesh! Clean the seed and roughen it up with a piece of sandpaper. Place this in moist compost at around 15°C, then

**If you are a seed supplier offering mango, please get in touch!**

*Above: Unripe mangos on a mature tree.*

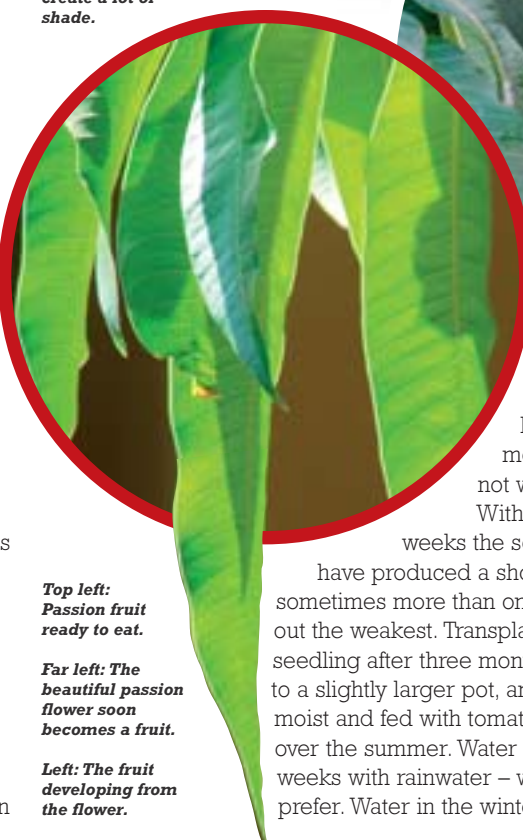
*Far right: Ripening mangos change colour as they sweeten.*

*Right: Mango leaves are pendulous and create a lot of shade.*

*Top left: Passion fruit ready to eat.*

*Far left: The beautiful passion flower soon becomes a fruit.*

*Left: The fruit developing from the flower.*



keep it moist but not wet. Within six weeks the seed will have produced a shoot – sometimes more than one, just cut out the weakest. Transplant the seedling after three month's growth to a slightly larger pot, and keep it moist and fed with tomato food over the summer. Water every two weeks with rainwater – which they prefer. Water in the winter only to

stop it drying out. After a year pinch out the growing tip, which will make the plant more bushy.

You can repeat this on the other branches to create a plant that's happy being small enough to be manageable in a polytunnel. Mango trees in the tropics grow to 40m. By the following June there should be flowers and, by late summer, fruits should be ripening. Remove the fruit as late as you can at the end of summer. ■