

Not so hardy climbers

By R. W. Sidwell

The sheltered corner, the glass-roofed car-port, the sun-lounge are all places where we may grow climbing plants that require a little more protection that is found in the open garden. The unheated greenhouse, or better still, one from which frost can be excluded, is even better if room can be spared when we have grown our bedding plants, planted out tomatoes, cucumbers, melons, peppers and aubergines; potted on our fuchsias and attended to all the other plants we try to grow in our six by four house. Climbers have one advantage, they do get off the ground; and if shade is not objected to do not interfere too much with low level occupants.

South America has given us many fine plants and not the least of these are the many climbers which have real character. The periwinkle family contains some very choice subjects. One of these *Mandevilla suaveolens*, is an evergreen twiner with white two-inch-wide flowers, with delicious perfume. One difficulty with this plant — and some others — is that it dislikes root restriction and does not feel happy in the confines of a pot. It may do well for a year or two but for real success it should be planted out where it can have unlimited root run. It will then lash out with its ten-feet-a-year stems and take over all available space.

In complete contrast with the last, but also from Chile, is the well-known *Eccremocarpus scaber*, which is hardy enough to plant outdoors in sheltered corners. Several plants actually came through the last winter quite unharmed. This requires qualifying. They were cut to the ground, as they would be in any winter, but broke freely from the bottom as usual. This plant has sprays of tubular orange flowers and climbs by means of leaf tendrils. There are also red and yellow forms which can sometimes be bought. In contrast with the last species, *eccremocarpus* is a very accommodating plant. It can be grown as an annual, flowering in midsummer from a spring sowing. A five or six-inch pot will support a six-foot high plant which will be full of bloom until the autumn. The large inflated seed pots are filled with little sequin-like seeds which germinate as freely as cabbage seed.

Still in Chile we might mention that very choice plant *Lapageris rosea*. This is a real plant for the connoisseur, not easy to establish, disliking lime, disliking sun and needing a cool moist root run in a frost-free site, it is one of those plants which makes one hold one's breath when seeing a really good specimen for the first time. The three-inch long funnel-shaped flowers are thick and waxy and of a beautiful shade of pink.

From Western Australia comes *Sollya heterophylla*, the Bluebell Creeper. This is usually seen as a slender climber or sprawler about four or five feet high but under good conditions it will reach the roof. Also

from Australia are two species of *Pandorea*, *P. jasminoides*, the Bower plant and *P. pandorana*, the Wonga-wonga vine. Both have pinkish tubular flowers in sprays. I am inclined to think that these are happier when planted out but they can take up a lot of space.

The Far East provides us with many of our finest garden plants and among these are some good climbers. *Trachelospermum asiaticum* is a self-clinging evergreen climber which can become quite large in time. The jasmine-like flowers are whitish, turning pale yellow with age, and are sweetly scented. Slightly less hardy is *T. jasminoides*. This is less vigorous than the above species and the flowers are a little larger and just as sweetly scented. A varietal form *wilsonii* has leaves which turn red in winter with paler veins. It is even more desirable than the ordinary species.

The jasmynes bring us nearer to home. The yellow winter-flowering jasmine is as tough as anything we grow and it may come as a surprise to some to learn that this, too, comes from China and has been with us for less than 140 years. The common sweet-scented jasmine, *Jasminum officinale*, on the other hand, is an old occupant of our gardens and was well known in Tudor England. Both of these are so hardy that we do not consider using them in sites where more tender things can be grown.

Most popular among the more tender jasmynes is *J. polyanthus* which is grown as a commercial pot plant for sale early in the year. Trained around supporting stakes and neatly tied, it makes a compact tidy plant. Allowed to have free reign, it will quickly cover the side of a greenhouse and fill the air with its delicious scent in the spring. Flowering later in the year and continuing for quite a long time is the less common *J. azoricum*. This has larger flowers than the last species and is almost as strongly scented. It is one of the best of summer flowering greenhouse climbers. Where a very large area has to be covered there is the yellow flowered species *J. mesnyi* which we used to know as *J. primulinum*. This is spring flowering and is slightly scented. The flowers are larger than the common yellow jasmine.

We cannot leave the tender climbers without mentioning Passion flowers. The common *Passiflora coerulea* is frequently grown outdoors against a south facing wall but some require more protection. *P. edulis* provides the Passion Fruit of commerce, and will fruit freely under glass here with normal care. The granadilla, *P. quadrangularis* has the most remarkable flowers, with the corona hanging down like tentacles. It requires a little more heat than some but it is worth a little extra care.



Eccremocarpus Scaber.