

Award-winning *W. brachybotrys* 'Okayama' is sweetly scented



Wisteria's one of my great passions!

It was love at first sight for Fiona Butcher when she first came across a wisteria in full blossom, which had sprawled over a derelict house in Cumbria. The experience ignited a passion for this iconic spring-flowering, woody climber which, almost 20 years later, resulted in her being accorded National Plant Collection status by conservation charity Plant Heritage.

After successfully air layering two plants from her new discovery and growing wisteria from seed, she soon set about searching out



Fiona Butcher

Her collection started in 1999 and is open by appointment. Visit www.cumbria.wisteria.co.uk; tel: 01229 716677.

varieties in nurseries and garden centres. She has kept *Wisteria sinensis* successfully as a bonsai, another horticultural passion. The shrubs she once had in her garden were removed to make way for her new-found interest. Remarkably Fiona grows a large proportion of her four species and 37 different varieties of wisteria in pots in her modest 13m (42½ft) garden in Cumbria, and gained

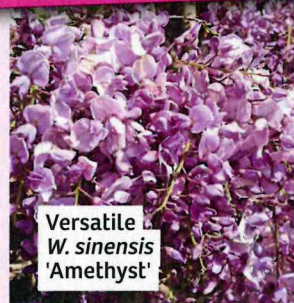
valuable experience in growing them in this way. She keeps her containerised plants in 20cm (8in) tubs, re-potting them every two years by removing spent compost and pruning off about half the roots, then using three parts John Innes No 3 loam-based compost, two parts multi-purpose compost and one part grit. She avoids letting her plants dry out and only

gives a low-nitrogen feed in August. "All you need is a pair of scissors to be successful with wisteria, as pruning is the main key to success," said Fiona, who runs a waterproof clothing business with her partner. "After that they practically look after themselves."

With the main framework in place she controls growth by constantly cutting back new shoots to two leaves, producing the short spurs that produce the flowers. "I advise cutting back after flowering, then pruning back again in late winter to two buds," she said. She considers *W. floribunda multijuga*, *W. sinensis* 'Amethyst' and later-flowering North American variety *W. frutescens* 'Amethyst Falls' the most rewarding for pots. *W. sinensis*

BE A
PLANT
HERO

Grow your own!



Versatile *W. sinensis* 'Amethyst'

One of the best all-round varieties

W. sinensis 'Amethyst' is held in high esteem by Fiona for its many qualities, also recognised by the RHS, which gave it its Award of Garden Merit. It flowers reliably when young, is sweetly scented, produces bronze-toned foliage in spring and as it matures and is pruned to shape its vigour declines, making it ideal for growing in pots. It's available from www.crocus.co.uk; tel: 01344 578111.

'Prolific' is another all-round star performer she recommends.

Fiona would like to see breeders develop a double, white *W. floribunda* and *W. sinensis* and a pink-toned variety of *W. sinensis*, none of which are currently available. "I'd also like to experiment by creating bonsai of all the varieties I have to see how they perform!"

How you can be a plant hero

You can help preserve rare and unusual plants in your garden. The Plant Heritage charity works to conserve the nation's garden plants through the National Plant Collection® scheme and individual Plant Guardians®,

and is looking for Garden News readers to get involved with its crucial work. Contact collections@plantheritage.org.uk for information or visit www.plantheritage.org.uk.



Plant Heritage
CONSERVING THE DIVERSITY OF GARDEN PLANTS

Are you growing any rare or unusual plants? Let us know – see our contact details on page 3

#GNREAL GARDENS



Fiona has created a bonsai *W. sinensis*