

Choosing from the best

Wisteria are perhaps the most spectacular of climbers, but gardeners usually only have room for one or two. On the launch of a new RHS monograph of these plants, the following selections prove among the most reliable

Author: **Chris Lane**, Vice Chairman of the RHS Woody Plant Committee

Wisteria sinensis 'Prolific' AGM

History: this fine cultivar was named in 1968 but was in fact the original *W. sinensis* introduced to the UK in 1816 from the garden of Consequa in Canton, China. When it first flowered in England it caused a sensation and was soon distributed around the world: it is perhaps the most well-known *Wisteria* in cultivation and has received many different names. Most plants sold as *W. sinensis* will be this cultivar. This and other wisterias shown here have an RHS hardiness rating of H6 (-20 to -15°C/-4 to 5°F).

Flowering time: early to mid-April, with all wisteria time of flowering is influenced by local conditions.

Flower characteristics: flowers have a pale mauvish blue upper (standard) petal with a yellow eye; other petals are darker. Flowers have a strong, sweet scent.

Flower raceme length: 22–27 cm (8½–10½in).



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Wisteria floribunda f. *multijuga* 'kyushaku' AGM

History: this cultivar is of unknown origin in Japan, but as far as can be ascertained arose in the early part of the Edo period (1603–1868), possibly before. The name 'kyushaku' refers to the length of the raceme, a *shaku* being a measurement of length in Japan (approximately 25cm/10in); *kyushaku* is nine *shaku*. A *perigola*, archway or *loggia* festooned with the long pale mauve racemes of this selection, taking in the scent and the hum of bees, can be a remarkable experience.

Flowering time: mid-April to late May.

Flower characteristics: each flower has white, flushed mauve upper (standard) petals with a small yellow eye; side (wing) and inner (keel) petals are mauvish violet.

Raceme length: 85–110cm (33½–43in).

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Wisteria floribunda f. *rosea* 'Hon-bent' AGM

History: this fine selection (syn. *W. floribunda* 'Rosea') has long been in cultivation in Japan, certainly from the early Meiji period (1868–1912), and was known by the Nakayama family of *Wisteria* raisers. 'Hon-bent' has the palest flowers and is superb for *pergolas*, archways or growing as a standard. Young foliage is bronzy green turning yellow in autumn.

Flowering time: mid- to late May.

Flower characteristics: flowers each have a white standard petal heavily flushed with pink, and a small yellow eye. The wing and keel petals are white, flushed with mauvish pink; overall, a good pink selection.

Raceme length: 35–47cm (14–18½in).



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***Wisteria brachybotrys*
'Okayama' AGM**

History: origin uncertain, but presumably collected from Okayama Prefecture in southwest Honshu. Cultivated since the Meiji period (1868–1912) in Japan and in Europe soon after. It is vigorous and repays careful pruning; train on a wall, as a standard or into a suitable tree. It combines short but broad, dark mauvish purple racemes with dark bronze emerging foliage.

Flowering time: early to mid-April.

Flower characteristics: each flower has a mauve standard, with a white centre and small pale yellow eye. Wing and keel petals are dark mauvish purple. Flowers have wonderful scent.

Raceme length: 22–28cm (8½–11in).



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***Wisteria floribunda* f. *alba*
'Shiro-noda' AGM**

History: this superb cultivar most likely originated from the area of Noda, north of Tokyo, during the Meiji period (1868–1912) or earlier. With its long racemes it is ideally suited to cultivation on pergolas and arches.

Flowering time: mid- to late May.

Flower characteristics: scented; white standard with pale yellow eye. Wing and keel petals are white with a faint mauve tip to the keel.

Raceme length: 36–50cm (14–20in).

Resources

Plants are listed in *RHS Plant Finder 2019*, and at rhs.org.uk/findaplant

In *The Garden* podcast May 2019, Chris Young chats with RHS Garden Wisley Curator Matthew Pottage about growing wisteria and new ideas for pruning: rhs.org.uk/thegardenpodcast

***Wisteria*
The complete guide**

by James Compton and Chris Lane, Royal Horticultural Society, May 2019, 304pp, RRP £40, ISBN 9781907057885
RHS offer price £37

The third in the acclaimed series of RHS Horticultural Monographs, this book reveals the horticulture, botany and history of one of the most spectacular garden plants.

All five species and nearly 100 cultivars are illustrated and described. Information is given on the history of these plants in cultivation, with detailed advice on cultivation and garden use.

Offer price available from RHS mail order until 31 August; 01483 211320; rhshop.co.uk

