

GROWER PROFILE: MEET STEVE GRAY & TRISH HATFIELD



Steve & Trish run a dedicated passionfruit farm at the highly picturesque spot of Wonga Beach, just north of Port Douglas in northern Queensland. With just under 3,000 vines all laid out to overhead trellis, the farm is exceptionally beautiful with the lush green canopy and dangling purple baubles.

Not many people know that Steve was originally a professional fisherman. In fact, fishing is still his first love, but with the loss of his father Steve came back to utilise the family farm many years ago.

Steve and Trish currently grow mostly the purple Misty Gem variety, although Steve is experimenting with some Pandora vines this year. The Misty Gem variety gives two good crops with a small lull in production in between. Like many growers in the northern tropics, Steve replants each and every year in December and his harvesting window falls between July and late November.

When asked what he likes about growing passionfruit, Steve points to the fact that he is his own boss (Trish excepted of course!). He starts afresh every year with

new plants and new optimism, and each year is different. "They can be a right pain in the arse," Steve admits; and what other grower would not agree?

His most important tip, particularly for the less experienced growers, is to get your disease control measures in place right from the outset. "You can't leave it until tomorrow as it will come back and bite you very quickly," said Steve. Left unchecked, some diseases can simply spread like wildfire and once they take hold, they are far harder to manage.

Steve uses the resources that are available from the DPI stations at both Mareeba and South Johnstone to tap into the experts on the ground who can help with the diagnosis of difficult disease issues.

Some services are still free and the DPI are a great place to start with anything that the **Passionfruit Field Guide** cannot assist you with.

And if he hadn't become a farmer? Well he would have stayed on a boat for the rest of his life, a line over the side and a cold drink to hand. Maybe that's something to look forward to once his passionfruit days are done? What a nice way to spend your days.

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