

GROWER PROFILE: MEET THE STRETCHS

BY JANE RICHTER

Anton & Marcia Stretch purchased Passiondale from Ray & Rita Lee at Beerwah in the Sunshine Coast Hinterland in 2014.

The farm is a boutique husband-and-wife operation and so far has focussed on smaller volume, very high quality fruit all from overhead trellis frames. They have 1200 vines currently, but are experimenting with some changes to their infrastructure that will take them up to about 2000 – all Sweetheart variety.

Anton and Marcia have three adult children who are spread all over Australia. They do visit often and like to lend a hand when they can. James is particularly useful being a successful entrepreneur who has brilliant ideas that he shares with his parents whenever he's in their part of the world. Their two girls get drafted in as slave labour whenever they fly in from the far-flung parts of Australia where they currently live.

So what do you love about growing passionfruit?

"It's the marvel of the plants themselves – lush, cool green leaves with stunning flowers that respond so well to the love that we lavish upon them," says Anton. As new growers, the pair accept they may have made the odd blunder (who hasn't?!), but it's the way the vines seem to be able to flourish even in the face of some unconventional treatment that makes this pair love passionfruit farming.

And the not so good bits?

"It breaks my heart when I go out to pick the fruit and the sun has already burnt it – its gone from priceless to worthless in such a short space of time," says Marcia. Marcia also dislikes pulling out the old vines to make way for new plants, "it just feels like such a negative thing to do after all the time spent trying to get the buggers to thrive!"

What surprising fact would few people know about you?

"We were movie stars once! Says Marcia. Yes – believe it or not they had their first and last starring roles in the film 'Keys to Freedom' alongside Omar Shariff and Jane Seymour. For the full story, buy Anton a Coopers at the next Passionfruit Australia get together and he'll tell all...

ANTON'S TOP TIPS:

"Read the manual, keep the field guide always to hand & don't be shy about asking fellow growers in your area for tips that might help you"

