

PYROSTEGIA

Bignoniaceae family

Pyrostegia venusta syn. *Bignonia ignea*

Common name: Flame Vine, Orange Trumpet Vine

Pyrostegia venusta really knows how to misbehave. Just give it an inch and it will take a mile or even more if it gets the chance. It will enthusiastically scramble over anything that lies within its reach and, although my original intention was for it to cover a dilapidated wooden fence, it had its own ideas of where it wanted life to lead it and it's kept me busy with the regular pruning that's required to control its adventurous ways. It has clambered over the roof of the shadehouse, twined its way up every nearby tree and, from their lofty branches, it has draped its long curtain of evergreen foliage down to a meandering pathway. Putting down new roots wherever it has touched the ground, it has scrambled over and smothered every low-growing plant that lies within its avaricious grasp.

There is no question that this species can make a nuisance of itself but when I'm tearing my hair out in frustration at its antics and contemplating some almost unthinkable strategy, such as giving it a taste of a weedkiller, it bursts into bloom and murder is suddenly the last thing on my mind. With rapid speed it conceals its emerald green foliage beneath masses of vivid orange trumpet-shaped flowers that brighten the duller days of winter and spring.

Suddenly it has earned a reprieve and become my best mate once again and although its wild ways are temporarily forgiven they're certainly not forgotten.

The vibrant floral display of *P. venusta*, backed by its near-invincibility, has guaranteed its continuing existence in my garden. It is tough in every way and, whether growing in light shade or in full sun, it will cope with hot and dry conditions as well as wet and humid weather, providing its roots are in well-draining soil.

As a species that was born in the tropical jungles of South America it cannot tolerate frost, but given ample room to indulge its unruly behaviour it routinely puts on a dazzling performance that stops everyone in their tracks.





MALPIGHIA

Family: Malpighiaceae

Malpighia coccigera

Common name: Singapore Holly

I'm not sure who gave this shrub the colloquial name of Singapore Holly but they've certainly sown the seeds of confusion, for *Malpighia coccigera* originated in the West Indies.

The first of this species to be invited into my garden was miserable and sickly when I acquired it. It took some time to adapt to its new life here and although it eventually sprouted masses of leaves and looked as though it had finally evaded the clutches of the Grim Reaper it never put on an outstanding performance. For many months it was underwhelming. Then, when my patience with its progress had almost been exhausted, a heavy scent of floral perfume wafted through the garden and I discovered that *M. coccigera* had simply been waiting in the wings for the optimum time to stage a memorable performance.

I proudly introduced it to every visitor and perhaps it was the praise heaped upon it that encouraged it to bloom year after year. Although each of its white flowers may be tiny, the huge volume that it produces almost submerge its foliage.

It's a prickly character and now that it's in good health I have to say that there's not a single day when it's unattractive and for much of the year it's a mass of vivid green glossy leaves that,





with their spiny edges, make it a handsome evergreen shrub that, although it's tucked away in a secluded section of the garden, never goes unnoticed for very long.

Its delicate and long-lasting blooms, which appear in spring and summer, attract a wide range of insects, including bees that know a good thing when they see it. The small red berries that follow its flowers mean there are tasty snacks on offer for many of the garden's birds too.

The name of this genus honours the 17th century Italian naturalist Marcello Malpighia and he'd have been proud to see how well this humble shrub has adapted to garden life. All it needs to thrive is a frost-free location with well-draining soil that's in either partial shade or full sun and once established it will survive the most punishing of droughts with no hint of wilted leaves or other signs of distress.

It can reach a height of around 1.5 metres and a width of approximately a metre and needs only minimal pruning every now and then to enable it to look its best day in and day out and being easy to propagate from cuttings I've ensured that hordes of this species proudly stand to attention in my congested garden.