

Chaenomeles - Growing Guide

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Flowering quince, Japanese quince, Japonica

At Caerhays we have had a Japanese quince, *Chaenomeles japonica*, for over 100 years. It produces large numbers of pinkish-red flowers in March and April which are followed by huge apple-sized fruits, green then yellow, in autumn. People from the village have been making quince jelly and jam from these fruits for generations. Personally I am allergic to the smell of ripe quinces which is quite stomach churning. Even the birds and mammals hardly have a nibble and, personally, I would not dream of touching the jam.

Nevertheless the many varieties of flowering quince which the nursery offers in a spectacular array of different colours do have a worthy place in the garden. Most do set rather smaller fruit than *C. japonica*, even as young plants, but the scale of the smell is containable.

Quinces come from mountain woodland in Japan and China but they have been bred and hybridised over the years to produce much more colourful garden plants. All the taller growing varieties can make ideal wall shrubs although they will need some wires or supports to train them up the fence or wall initially. They are however equally happy in a shrub border or in a woodland setting. The flowers are cup-shaped with five petals and the plants flower best when grown in full sun rather than shade. *Chaenomeles* will tolerate lime but grow best in fertile well drained soil. Light pruning of taller new growths is recommended in autumn or spring for wall grown plants but remember that they flower on last year's wood so do not be too drastic.

Most quinces grow to 5-8ft in height eventually with a larger eventual spread of perhaps double this in a woodland context. The exception with us is *C. speciosa* 'Geisha' which has a more dwarf spreading habit and is

only 2½ft or so tall after 25 years. It has attractive double apricot flowers and one inch quinces. Despite its apparent reputation it has resisted the temptation to become a wall shrub and is actually closer to being a groundcover in a small border.

The best of *C. speciosa* varieties are:

‘Moerloosei’ (‘Apple Blossom’) – white flowers flushed dark pink

‘Nivalis’ – upright habit and white flowers

‘Rubra’ – a popular red variety

‘Simonii’ – blood red semi-double flowers and a more spreading habit

Amongst those of *C. x superba*:

‘Crimson and Gold’ – crimson petals and golden anthers

‘Jet Trail’ – another lower growing dwarfish or trailing variety with pure white flowers

‘Lemon and Lime’ – greenish yellow flowers fading to white. A good fruit producer.

‘Nicoline’ – deep scarlet

‘Pink Lady’ – a clear rose pink

Chaenomeles are most easily propagated by layering shoots in the border in the autumn but will propagate fairly easily from early to mid season softwood cuttings.