

## Passionflower, Passion Vine, Maypop - *Passiflora incarnata*

One of my favorite summer climbing vines is the passionflower. An uncommon Texas native, the passionflower has the most interesting, complex, and beautiful blooms found anywhere. There are actually about 400 species of *passiflora*; however *incarnata* is used in Texas. The passionflower will die back in winter, and will usually come right back in the spring, if it is the hardy species. The fast-growing perennial has tendrils to help it hold on to a chain-link fence or trellis.



Plant passion vines in full to part sun as they like well-drained soils and moderate water, but can be amenable to many types of soils. Once established they are drought tolerant and look best if left alone in the natural or informal landscape. It grows vigorously in the summer, so prune out inner dead foliage to keep it tidy and prevent the buildup of inner deadwood.

The only major pest (if you can call it a pest), would be the caterpillar of the gulf fritillary butterfly. Passionflower is the larval food of this striking butterfly. During the summer season, you can see the gulf fritillary flying about the vine, occasionally laying pin-head sized yellow eggs on the foliage, and caterpillars munching away on most all parts of the plant.



Confusion persists on which variety is native. The difference is that the native species has three lobed leaves; the naturalized Asian varieties have five lobed leaves. Many of the colorful varieties (red, etc.) are tropical and freeze during the winter and do not return as a perennial.

Propagate from seed or softwood cuttings. *Passiflora* 'incense' is a perennial variety that is a cross between *P. incarnata* and an Argentinean species. It is hardy and in mild winters will hold its foliage through cold spells. Flowers are five inches wide, violet with a lighter crown.

### Interesting Tidbits:

- The passion vine is used as a medicinal herb as treatment of insomnia and nervousness. It's also used as a sedative in nervous disorders, anxiety, and reduces spasms by depressing the central nervous system.
- The name comes from a religious significance in which the flower parts symbolize elements of the passion of Christ: the lacy crown could be a halo or crown of thorns, the five stamens, the five wounds, the ten petal-like parts, the ten faithful apostles<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Sunset Western Garden Book