



Alabama's *TREASURED Forests*
513 Madison Avenue
P.O. Box 302550
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-2550

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
MONTGOMERY AL
PERMIT NO 109



PASSION FLOWER

(*Passiflora incarnata*)

By Fred Nation, Environmental Services, Baldwin County

P*assiflora incarnata* is a non-woody native vine that climbs by means of tendrils. Common names include 'passion vine' and 'wild apricot.' The leaves are alternate, sharply three-lobed, to 6 inches across, and ever-green most years in the Deep South. Passion flower occurs in well-drained, open, sunny sites throughout Alabama and the Southeast, from Delaware, west to Kansas, south to Texas and Florida.

The spectacular blooms are blue, purple, or rarely white, to 4 inches across, with five petals and five sepals. The complex flowers have a 'crown' or corona of numerous fringelike segments that arise above the petals. The reproductive parts are quite unusual, adding to the strange beauty of the flowers.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Spanish missionaries envisioned the unique physical structures of this plant, particularly the numbers of the various flower parts, as symbols of the events leading to the crucifixion. This explains both the genus and vernacular names which are 'passion flower.'

The plants bloom for several months in Alabama, from June into September. They attract a large number of beautiful insects, including butterflies such as zebra longwing, gray hairstreak, and

Gulf fritillary. The fruits are the size, shape and color of small limes, ripening to a dull yellow. They develop an air cavity around the seeds, which makes a muted popping sound when they are stepped-on or squeezed. This explains another common name: 'maypop.'

Although passion flower has not found wide acceptance by the mainstream medical community in the United States, it has been recognized by the National Pharmacopeias of France, Germany, Switzerland, Great Britain, and a number of Eastern and Central European countries. The catalog of medical uses alleged for this species is truly remarkable. A brief list includes such diverse ailments as burns, hemorrhoids, insomnia, muscle cramps, hysteria, neuralgia, hypertension, boils, and a tonic for the liver.

In the landscape, *Passiflora incarnata* is a spectacular, trouble-free perennial with nearly year-round interest. It makes a fast-growing cover for fences, a handsome dark green screen for swimming pools, and a covering for utility poles. While passion flower can be grown from seed, potted stock is often available at native plant sales, and . . . the butterflies and bumble bees will thank you all summer long! ♣

