

**The Passion of Passion Vines**  
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When you're looking for a vine for that special trellis, fence or arbor, the passion vine (*Passiflora* species) should be at the top of your list. Passion vines are one of the most beautiful twiners that we can grow here. The exotic blooms are not only fascinating to look at; most emit an intoxicating scent, and a few even produce a fruit that has a delightful flavor that combines tropical pineapple and crisp white grapes.



Passion vines originated in South America, moved through the tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas, and have spread to Hawaii, the Gulf Coast, and the Carolinas. There are reports of naturalized passion vines in Kentucky, Illinois, and even New York.

If you enjoy butterflies in your garden, then you definitely need some passion vine. Not only are the blossoms a rich nectar source for adult butterflies, the leaves are an important food source for some of our most beautiful butterfly caterpillars, including the Gulf Fritillary and the Zebra Longwing.

Our native Passion Flower, *Passiflora incarnata*, can be found growing on sunny fence lines and in open fields throughout the region. Commonly called maypops, for the sound they make when stepped on, the fruits are delicious, with pomegranate-like seed pods filled with rich juice. Other species that perform well in our area are: *Passiflora x incense*; five inch, royal purple blooms with lacy corollas overlaying the petals. *Passiflora coccinea*; exotic, vivid red petals with black filaments. *Passiflora caerulea*; heavy bloomer with sky-blue corollas over white petals. Two of the best types for attracting butterflies are *Passiflora x alto-caerulea*, with violet and white star shaped flowers and deeply cut foliage, and *Passiflora lutea*, with dainty yellow blossoms and lightly variegated leaves.

There are many other varieties, some with extremely unusual flower forms, but most are a little too tender for our area. They make fine container plants, or you can grow them as annuals, as many do with mandevilla in our area.

Easy to grow, passion vines have few requirements. They need a sturdy trellis or arbor. Choose a sunny, well-drained spot. Fertilize regularly and water weekly for best bloom.

One of the most interesting facets of the passionflower is the religious symbolism attached to it. As the legend goes, a Jesuit priest in Peru in the 17th century discovered passionflowers and

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had a vision that associated the various parts of the flower with the crucifixion. The five petals and five sepals represent the ten faithful Apostles present at the Crucifixion. The five anthers represent Christ's wounds, the pistils the nails, and the corona was the thorny crown. The leaves of the passion vine were Roman spears, and the tendrils their whips.

Passion vines also have medicinal uses. The leaves contain a natural sedative, and have been used as a remedy for nervousness and insomnia. Pick up a passion vine; there's so much wonder packed into these exotic beauties!

For more information about gardening in our area, visit the University of Florida IFAS Leon County Extension website at <http://leon.ifas.ufl.edu>.

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*Photo by Gary Knox, UF-IFAS Extension: Passiflora x 'Incense', a hybrid passion vine.*

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