

September 2014

Purple Passion Vine (*Passiflora incarnata*)

by Shirley Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener

Purple passion vine to me conjures up visions of exotic places, a rain forest perhaps or the sounds of the rolling surf. But, thankfully, this beautiful plant resides in my side yard, and it's extremely happy to be here.



The purple fashion-flower is an herbaceous vine growing up to 25 feet long and clings by way of axillary tendrils or sprawls along the ground. It has intricate, 3" lavender flowers on a short stalk. One common name is Maypop, which comes from the hollow, yellow fruits that "pop" loudly when crushed. This unusual flower is distributed widely from Florida to Texas. The plants were given the name Passionflower or Passion vine because the floral parts are said to represent aspects of the Christian

crucifixion story, sometimes referred to as the Passion. The 10 petal-like parts represent disciples of Jesus, excluding Peter and Judas; the 5 stamens the wounds Jesus received; the knob-like stigmas the nails used to hang Him on the cross; the fringe the crown of thorns.

My Passion vine is the host plant for the Gulf Fritillary butterfly. And, oh my, do they love this plant! This year seems to have been a particularly good year for the GF butterfly. They (the butterflies) did not arrive until my Passion vine had really grown to a good size. And when the GF got here, the females began at once to alight, touch their abdomens to a leaf and deposit a very tiny, yellow egg. After a few days, the eggs began to hatch and the tiny ½" long caterpillar emerged. And it was ravenous! Because my Passion vine was so well established, all the hungry babies did not seem to phase it. It grew faster than the GF caterpillars could eat it! The vine is blooming now and the flowers are beautiful!



Not only is this plant the host to several other butterflies (Zebra Longwing, Crimson-patch Longwing, Red-banded Hairstreak, Julia Butterfly, Mexican Butterfly), but the American Indians consumed the fruit. The Indians would poultice the roots for boils, cuts, earaches and inflammation. A tea was brewed to sooth nerves and treat insomnia.



My plant dies back to the ground each winter. This year, I had mulched it heavily so when those two freezes hit it was not harmed. Can't beat a good layer of mulch (think very warm blanket) for protecting plants during the winter as well as conserving moisture during our hot, dry summers.



The Purple passion plant may be propagated by seeds or cuttings. I have had success in just digging up a piece that comes up where I don't want it, burying it in the ground and then keeping it well watered for the next couple of weeks. To have such delicate flowers, this plant is very hardy for our climate. My plant is growing on a two-rail split rail fence in full sun. I have had to add additional string for it to climb on.

So, if you have a chance (and a place) to grow this plant, don't hesitate. You will not be disappointed.

Source: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center (Internet) (Native Plant Database)

Wild Clematis (*Clematis vitalba*)

by Sheryl Kleinschmidt, Somervell County Master Gardener

Mother Nature has surprised me once again. Just when I think I've seen it all, she displays another species right under my nose and sticks out her tongue to say, "Nanny-nanny boo-boo— look what I can do!"

This time it was the wild clematis. I discovered it growing on the old barn behind my house about a week ago as I walked up the driveway to my truck. Thinking I was seeing things, I quickly walked closer to observe an abundance of creamy-white blossoms trailing down from a height of about 15 feet.



Having lived in the same location for six years, this is the first time I've seen the clematis in bloom and assume the seeds either blew in or were dropped by birds last year. I took a small cutting to a very knowledgeable neighbor who identified it for me and I began researching the plant. It was confusing at first due to the large number of varieties—some wild, some not (there are hundreds).

After close examination, I discovered that the variety growing behind my house is the *Clematis vitalba*. It is described as a fast-growing woody vine that can climb up to 30' (sometimes taller) and has an undetermined amount of ground spread.

The wild clematis is known by many common names such as Old Man's Beard, Traveler's Joy, Devil's Darning Needle, Virgin's Bower and Woodbine. Its bright green leaves make a great backdrop for large masses of white flowers which bloom late summer to autumn. It is an import from Europe and southwestern Asia — not native to America. Maybe that accounts for it not being affected by many pests here.

Once done flowering, the lingering style remains with long, silky hairs trailing down on all sides—thus the name Old Man's Beard. When dried, the seeds are propagated by wind and animals, much like milkweed is spread.



The wild clematis is a very adaptable plant and is viable in Zones 4-8. It will grow in shade or sun but does prefer afternoon shade. It will tolerate most soil types and can do quite well in drought situations. However, given the opportunity and lots of moisture, it will "go to town".

Some of our northwestern states (Washington, Oregon) consider the wild clematis to be an invasive plant as their cooler, wetter climate is conducive to vigorous growth. There, it has been seen to grow as tall as 100 feet into the treetops smothering many old-growth native trees. It is also prolific under bridges, in wood margins and hedgerows. Actually, it has become such a nuisance that the nurseries no longer keep it in stock as a garden plant.

The vines behind my house are welcome, however, and have a wonderful, sweet scent that attracts bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. As a matter of fact, I intend to take some cuttings and will watch in anticipation of the bearded seeds this fall.

Until then, I'll just enjoy the view.....

Community Horticultural Education Series

Somervell County Master Gardeners Present

The Community Horticultural Education Series

A Special “Back To School” Program

“Ask A Master Gardener”

Monday, September 8th at 6:30 pm

Citizens Center, 209 SW Barnard, Glen Rose

- A panel discussion lead by Master Gardeners will answer your questions about what to do in the garden this time of year, and try to find the answers to any other gardening questions you might have. Bring a picture or a cutting, and we will help you identify that “mystery plant” you’ve been wondering about. Come and enjoy a lively and informative conversation.
- Bring your questions to the meeting, or better yet, email them ahead of time to Shirley Smith, ssmith7003@gmail.com
- We always have great door prizes, handouts and refreshments.
- Remember, this program is free and open to the public. See you on the 8th of September!