

On the Fence...

My experience with *Passiflora incarnata* in Texas

by Jimmy Coppinger

My first encounter with *Passiflora* was in the late 1970's/early 1980's when I ordered some seed from Park Seed Company. The seeds were of *P. edulis* and I managed to get two plants to live. I grew them in hanging baskets with long wire hangers for them to climb on. I had very little information how to grow them and after two years without flowers, I let the winter take them away.

In 1984 I became interested in wildflowers and bought some books on the subject. I found there was a Passionflower (*P. incarnata*) that grew wild over much of the eastern and southern United States including the eastern half of Texas. This included Collin County in north-central Texas (near Dallas, approx. 34° N. latitude) where I live. I had never seen the plant and my interest at that time did not compel me to go searching for it.

Sometime after this, a neighbor of mine purchased some land in Hunt County which borders Collin County on the east. She had found a passionflower on her property but did not know what it was. She brought a flower of it to one of her neighbors who also did not know what it was. They knew of my interest in wildflowers so they came to me with it. I was able to immediately identify it as *P. incarnata*. This was the first time I had ever seen a real flower of *Passiflora*.

In January of 1993 I ordered a packet of *Passiflora* seeds from Thomson and Morgan. The packet was called "Passion Fruits of the World" which was a mixture of several species. I ended up with three plants. One was *P. edulis* and the two other were *P. caerulea*. All three were grown in pots on the patio.

With a growing interest in passionflowers, I turned my attention to the wild *P. incarnata*. I wondered if the plant could be found in my area. Information in the wildflower books indicated this possibility and my neighbors find in Hunt county was encouraging. The only way for me to know for sure was to scout the area myself. I needed to know what kind of places the plant could be found in. Geyata Ajilvsgi, in her book **Wildflowers of Texas**, describes the habitat of *P. incarnata* as "various soils in pastures, old fields, fencerows, along stream banks and edges of woodlands and thickets". She gave the bloom period as April to September.

On July 19, 1993, I decided to take a bike ride in the rural area east of town searching for *P. incarnata*. After 6 miles my hope of finding a passionflower was fading fast. Then, at the very end of a fence row, I looked, and there it was - *P. incarnata*! The vine had both flowers and fruit.

I considered this plant to be an example of *P. incarnata* in the

wild for several reasons. First, the people who lived there were not aware of the plants existence — it was just a weed to them. Second, the land enclosed by the fence has been pasture land for many years and has remained undisturbed. Third, a ditch between the road and fence was grown up with many weeds and the passionflower was growing among them. The vine was also growing inside the fence sprawling over open ground. Finally, I found sucker growths all along the fencerow to about a hundred feet south of the main vine complex. I believe that this plant had been growing there for many, many years.

I left the fruit on the vine as long as I could so the seeds could develop and mature. Meanwhile, in October I discovered flower buds on one of the *P. caerulea* on the patio. One or two buds opened in late October giving me my first *Passiflora* blooms. John Vanderplank's book **Passion Flowers**, 1st edition, became part of my library that October. The really cold weather arrived in November, forcing me to collect the *P. incarnata* fruits. I planted the fresh seeds on November 14 and by the end of the month several had come up.

In the spring of 1994, I planted one of the vines on a chain-link fence which runs north and south by the garden. This is my best vine. It became well established in that year and produced flowers but no fruit. Sucker growths appeared in the garden several feet from the main stem. Several of these growths were dug up and moved to different locations around the yard. The plants are easy to get started this way.



A misty early morning scene is the background for the 1996-97 Wild Louisiana Stamp, from a watercolor and acrylic painting by Rosemary John. The stamp portrays the striking Gulf Fritillary butterfly, *Agraulis vanillae*, on one of its native larval hostplants in Louisiana, Maypop (*Passiflora incarnata*). To obtain prints, stamps or posters, contact the artist at: P.O. Box 83933, Baton Rouge, LA 70884-3993, e-mail: zowood@unix1.sncc.lsu.edu.

In 1995, the vine produced flowers and fruit with the first fruit coming off in September. The sucker growths kept spreading into the garden but I just let them grow. I took some tomato cages and placed them over the growths so they would have something to climb on. Only a few fruits were produced in 1995 but I had lots of flowers. The vines are frequently visited by the Gulf Fritillary butterfly.

The main vine and its sucker growths reappeared early in 1996 and occupied an area of 187 square feet (17.3 sq meters). In August, new growths appeared 19 feet (6.9 meters) south of the main stem. There were not many fruits set in the spring of 1996. The first fruit to ripen fell from one of the sucker growths on July 13. It was 2.9 inches (72 mm) long and had many black seeds. I planted about half of them in pots (after eating the fragrant pulp around them) and by the end of July several had come up.

Fruit production increased in July and continued well into September. I believe the bumblebees are responsible for this increase. I did not notice any bumblebee activity on the flowers early in the season. But in July, August and September, there was a lot of bumblebee activity. They seem to be ideal pollinators for *P. incarnata*.

There is one more interesting observation concerning *P. incarnata* that I would like to share. I ordered some *P. incarnata* seeds from Thomson and Morgan in 1994. I wanted to compare the plants and flowers from their seed to mine to see if there would be any noticeable difference between them. The plants resulting from these seeds produced the first flowers in 1996 and the interesting thing here is that they were only two inches (50 mm) across. My native Texas plants produce flowers that are three inches (77 mm) across. 🍷

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