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Passionate About Passion Flowers

Passion is a curious concept. It combines intensity and desire, in its purest sense, to create an obsessive need. There is, figuratively and literally, a fine and not always obvious line between passion and irrationality.

Poets throughout history have waxed ad nauseam about one passion or another. The century, the geographic location and the poet's fatalism usually combined to focus on an object or concept of passion.

Today's passions run the gamut from politics, to sports, romance novels and horticulture. If it is out there and has a following, then some group is passionate about it.

Luckily, contemporary Wakulla County residents can enjoy a native horticulture passion with all the fixating beauty but none of the absurd obsessiveness. *Passiflora incarnata* is a fast growing perennial vine and commonly known as passion flower with a fruit called a maypop.

The vine is found in sunny areas, but will not grow in heavy shade. Untended fence rows, ditches and fallow fields are sites where this vine is frequently encountered.

The large bloom is complex and hypnotic with a multitude of shapes and angles within the structure. These blooms are attached to the climbing or trailing stems, but are found on the ground when there is nothing on which to climb.



The flower's color ranges from purple to near flesh color. The term *incarnata*, in the scientific name of this local wildflower, means flesh colored in Latin.

This dazzling regional native has been appreciated by many cultures. The Cherokee term for this bloom is Ocoee. This identifier lives on in Tennessee where the Ocoee River and the Ocoee Valley are still associated with this plant.

The passion flower vine produce fruit in mid-summer called a maypop. The maypop is green and approximately the size of a large lime, but turns yellow as it matures.

The interior of the fruit is white with abundant white seeds about the same size and shape of watermelon seed. Historically, colonial settlers and the indigenous natives before them have eaten the raw maypops and used them in a variety of culinary applications.

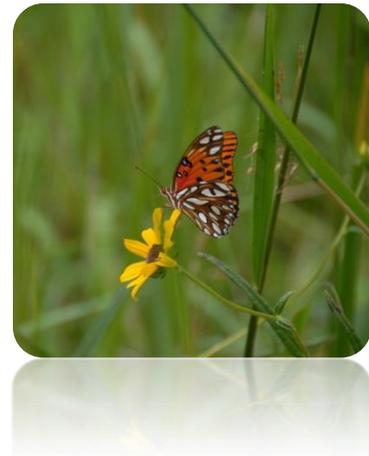
Additionally, the maypops have been used in an assortment of folk medicine formulas. While there has been some basic research into its medicinal properties, the most soothing use it to enjoy the blooms.

The passion flower vine plays a very important role with some of Wakulla County's insect residents. It, and other less common passion flower varieties, is the exclusive host plant for the Gulf Fritillary butterfly's caterpillar and a major food source for the Variegated Fritillary's caterpillar.

The Gulf Fritillary caterpillar is bright orange and covered with rows of medium length black spines. The spines are soft to the touch and do not sting, but if eaten the larva is toxic.

Gulf Fritillary butterflies are a muted orange with a large silver spot on the underside of each wing. They noted for their ability to traverse the Gulf of Mexico and travel as far as Argentina.

Gulf Fritillary butterflies have been able to expanded their range because of the cultivation of passion flower varieties. Luckily, Wakulla County has plenty occurring naturally.



To learn more about passion flowers and maypops contact the UF/IFAS Wakulla County Extension Office at 850-926-3931 or <http://wakulla.ifas.ufl.edu/>.