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Passiflora

Passifloraceae

Passiflora is derived from Latin *passi-* (suffering, passion) and *-flora* (flowered) components meaning ‘the Flower of the Passion’.

It is likely that many misunderstand the name Passion flower. Here ‘passion’ is used in a religious context and was associated with flowers in this genus during a period of especial religious fanaticism among many European Christians. For them it was believed that there was a symbolic association between the elements of the Crucifixion and the anatomical and numerical arrangement of the flower’s parts. The priests who accompanied the Spanish conquerors to Mexico and Peru in the 16th Century became imbued with the belief that the beautiful vine was a God-given sign that Christianity would be well received. They assumed further encouragement from the inhabitants’ enjoyment of the plant’s fruit as a food by choosing to view this as a sign that American Indians hungered after the Christian religion. One of its names for the Spanish colonists was Flower of the Five Wounds. Together the five petals and the five petal-like outer floral leaves (or sepals) represented the ten faithful apostles with the exclusion of Judas Iscariot and of either Peter (for his denial) or ‘doubting’ Thomas, according to different versions. The arrangement of outer petals (the corolla) symbolized the many disciples and the inner, the Crown of Thorns. The five stamens stood for the five wounds. The shape of the undeveloped seed (the ovary) suggested the hammer with which Christ was nailed to the cross. The slender, elongated part of the pistils with their rounded heads (the styles) represented the nails. The curling tendrils suggested the scourging whips, and the five-parted leaves were looked upon as the clutching soldiers’ hands.