

Passiflora incarnata

PASSION FLOWER is a perennial vine (normally low-climbing or trailing). Native to south-eastern United States it has sweet-scented, white, flesh-coloured, pale lavender or yellowish flowers with a pink or purple centre all surrounded by a purple and pinkish fringe.

It is also known as Apricot, Apricot vine, *Fleischfarbige Passionsblume* (German), Granadilla, Ground ivy, Holy Rood flower, Holy Trinity flower, *Kärsimyskukka* (Finnish), May apple, Maypop, Molly pop, *Passionsblume* (German), Passion vine, Pop apple, Purple passion flower, Rose coloured passionflower, Virginian climber, White passionflower, and Wild passion flower; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of faith, holy love, meditation, religious fervour, religious superstition, and susceptibility.

Branches, flowers and leaves are collected before the appearance of the fragrant, yellow to orange-coloured fruit for the extraction of drugs.

Warning – large doses can cause nausea and vomiting.

Incarnata means ‘flesh pink-coloured’ with reference to the colour of the petals.

The North American Cherokee Indians not only ate the fruit raw but also made them into a drink. Leaves and young shoots were eaten as a vegetable, either boiled or fried.

For one or two Indian tribes the vine offered medicine. It was a blood tonic for the North American Houma Indians, and the Cherokee used it to treat various liver complaints, boils, earache and wounds.

According to some authorities passion flower first bloomed on the European Continent in 1622 – and it had flowered in England by 1629. Others contend it was only cultivated in Europe as an ornamental plant from 1699 – and the flower is held by some to have peaked in popularity in the 19th Century.

In 1978 Romania used the vine to produce a sedative chewing gum. But according to records a marked increase in interest in passion flower raised its head in 1990 following consumer concern about alleged side effects from a sedative that used a particular amino acid called L-tryptophan.

The edible fruit have been used (particularly locally) to make sherbets, cocktails, punch, ice cream and water-ices, and in South America it has also featured as an ingredient in a popular soup. Today the fruit are used on a commercial basis by the drinks industry.

Medicinally, passion flower was recognized formally in 1867 in the United States and is still so accepted in some countries today. It continues to be used in folk medicine. It has been recommended for treating epilepsy, diarrhoea, dysentery, piles, insomnia, neuralgia, some skin disorders and period problems. Today it can be used for treating nervous disorders, insomnia, abnormal heart-beats and lowering blood pressure, and it is also employed in preventative medicine for several diseases, including asthma and whooping-cough. The plant provides an ingredient for some proprietary herbal remedies too.

It is the birthday flower for 23rd June.