

~ Ask Granny Earth ~

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Passion Flower

## ASK GRANNY EARTH

**Ever since seeing a picture of the Passion Flower, I've been trying to find one to buy. Are they rare? I'd love to grow my own and use it medicinally; can you help?**

I used to think it was rare, because I also had the same problem finding a Passion Flower plant. I also fell in love with its flower and became obsessed with growing it. Last year I decided to plant my own. I started the seeds inside in late February and they didn't sprout until August. I remember setting the seed container outside in May and I almost gave up on any sprouting. But then one day, long after, four plants started peaking up through the dirt. I was so excited to see them!

I brought the four plants in the house for winter, placed them in a sunny window and watched them take off. They really grew fast, taking lots of water. In February I took cuttings from the main plants and after dipping them in root hormone, planted them in dirt in a plastic bag. In about 4 – 6 weeks I had several new plants; very exciting! So from my experience, Passion Flower is very easy to grow and to propagate. My original plant

started blooming several weeks ago, one bloom at a time. My friend Rebecca, described its beauty quite poignantly: "Anyone looking at that flower, could never say that there is no God!"

**Passion Flower** (*Passiflora incarnata*): *Passiflora* is derived from Latin and means passion (resemblance the Crown of Thorns and Passion of Christ) and flower. *Incarnata* means flesh colored and alludes to part of the flower's color.

Its common name is Maypop Passion Flower. It's indigenous to tropical zones and is a perennial vine in this area. It has three lobed, finely serrated leaves and flesh-colored flowers which are tinged with purple. At the base of each leaf is a thin, little, curly vine which reaches out to twine around anything it can, including other leaves. Passion Flower thrives in full sun and likes well-drained soil. For medicinal purposes, gather the aerial parts when the flowers are in bloom.

The medicinal powers of Passion Flower date back 200 years to the early Central and North American Indians, who used it as an herbal tranquilizer. It was first used in North American medicine in the mid 1800's as a tea, in salves and as a poultice for headaches. Passion Flower was also popular for treating colic, diarrhea, epilepsy, menstruation cramps, insomnia, neuralgia, neurosis, piles and spasms.

Today it is widely employed by herbalists around the world as a sedative, hypnotic (inducing sleep), nervine, anti-spasmodic, pain reliever and to reduce high blood pressure. Among the conditions that Passion Flower is being used successfully for are: insomnia, Parkinson' Disease, seizures, convulsions, muscle cramps, hysteria, high blood pressure, tetanus, shingles, neuralgia, PMS and cramps, epilepsy, and as a general pain reliever. It is also gaining respect as a treatment for: hyperactivity in children, alcoholism, headaches and rapid heartbeat.

Passion Flower has been the subject of much scientific research for the past 100 years and so its sedative and anti-spasmodic effects have been firmly established. However, these effects have not been correlated to any one particular phyto-chemical found in the plant. It contains three major groups of phytochemicals: glycosides, flavonoids and alkaloids. When these chemicals are isolated and tested individually in laboratories, they have demonstrated the opposite reactions for which the plant is commonly know. But when they are combined as a 'whole' herb, researchers then observe the plant's sedative effects. This is just another example that the role of 'synergy' plays in herbal healing; the plants properties were created to work together as they occur in the whole, entire plant. If these properties are isolated, as in the case of pharmaceutical experiments, they do not work with the human body the way that Nature intended them to.

Passion Flower is classified as GRS (Generally Regarded as Safe) by the FDA. It is reputed to help people to have a restful sleep without any narcotic effects. This could be due to the plant's content of serotonin-like properties. It also contains Tyrosine and Phenylalanine, two amino acids that have gained the reputation of aiding in the relief of depression and alleviating pain, respectively.

Passion Flower is not only a beautiful vine with exquisite flowers but it's also an excellent herb to keep on hand for those times when you are feeling anxious or can't fall asleep. It is both safe and non-addictive. It also combines well with other relaxing herbs such as Lemon Balm and Chamomile.

I would suspect that as this plant becomes more popular and word gets out how easy it is to grow, we'll be seeing it more readily available in garden centers in the area. I have given starts to eight people so far and have several more cuttings taking root at this very moment. It grows so fast that it is rewarding for those of us that like 'instant gratification'.....be sure to have your camera ready!