

Native Passionflower Vine Shares Special Relationship with Two Florida Butterfly Species

Purple Passionflower

One of north Florida's most common native vines is the Purple Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*). It is a perennial vine that grows along the ground or will climb on any supporting object with the help of its tendrils. The flowers which are large and showy are produced from



late spring through summer. Typically light blue or lavender in color, their shape is of special interest. The large, egg-shaped fruits, called maypops, are produced two to three months after flowering. The plants do best in full sun on well drained fertile soils. They multiply readily by seed and suckers produced by established plants. Seedlings and divisions can easily be transplanted to share with



gardening friends. Of primary interest to gardeners is the passionflower's connection with two beautiful Florida butterflies, the Gulf Fritillary and the Zebra Longwing. The larval stages (caterpillars) of these two butterflies feed on the foliage of passionflower vines which they need to complete their life cycle.

Gulf Fritillary Butterfly

One of north Florida's most common butterflies is the Gulf Fritillary. These butterflies will be seen flying around our flower gardens for seven or eight months out of the year. They produce several generations each year with the adults laying single eggs in numerous locations on the foliage. The tiny larvae that hatch from the eggs grow rapidly feeding on plants in full sun. They develop a bright orange body with many black spines. The mature larva forms a pupa known as a chrysalis then metamorphoses into the orange adult. This species is migratory, overwintering in south Florida and moving northward with the return of spring. This is reminiscent of the much longer migration of monarch butterflies from the U. S. to Mexico.



Zebra Longwing Butterfly

The unique looking Zebra Longwing butterfly has been designated the official state butterfly of Florida, although it is somewhat of a rare site in north Florida due to our cold winters. The life cycle can be completed in as little as three to four weeks, but due to the unique ingestion of pollen which provides a source of extra amino acids, the adults can live up to six months. Females lay clusters of up to fifteen eggs on the leaves of passionflowers growing in the shade. The egg clusters and young larvae being close together on the same leaf tend to make them more vulnerable to predation, which may explain why their numbers are never as great as Gulf Fritillary butterflies. The larvae that do survive are white with black spines making them easy to identify. Zebra Longwings are not migratory so the last generation of the year will freeze in our area. Each year the species must slowly work its way up the state from the south in order to show up in north Florida. After being absent several years, Zebra Longwings appeared once again in Baker County after the mild winter of 2011-2012.

This fact sheet was written by Dr. Kyle Brown, Baker County Master Gardener and edited by Alicia Lamborn, Baker County Horticulture Agent, 2012. Photo Credits: Alicia Lamborn, Martha Waltman