



Pategai on Plants

“Flowers are restful to look at. They have neither emotions nor conflicts.”
— Sigmund Freud

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A Passionate Jewel

Each summer I look forward to the return of the Florida rains, the profuse blooming of hot-weather-loving tropical plants, and the return of *Agraulis vanillae nigrrior*, better known as the Gulf Fritillary. However, I digress.

Several years ago we were consumed by the lust of the passion vine. We hunted for unique, as well as the more common varieties of this mostly evergreen, tendril climber of the Passifloraceae family. With over 400 species, habitats ranging from tropical woodlands to grasslands, and nativity from tropical Asia, Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands to North, Central, and South America, you would think we have many favorites. But in our eyes, *Passiflora* ‘Amethyst’ is a jewel above them all.

P. ‘Amethyst’ is an old hybrid of unknown origin and parentage. Some speculate it is a hybrid of *P. amethystina*, which was cultivated in Europe at the beginning of the century, or of *P. caerulea*. Once sold as ‘Lady Lavender,’ *P.* ‘Amethyst’ is one of the best-known hybrids in Europe and is quickly gaining popularity in the U.S. This vigorous climber has a delicate look with slender stems and rich green leaves that are deeply lobed. If grown in full sun, the young vines are covered with bowl-shaped to recurved, rich purple to purple-blue flowers, up to 4.5 inches across during spring, summer, and fall. Left unattended, this vine can reach 12 feet or more.



Passiflora ‘Amethyst’

Photos by Stephen G. Pategas/Hortus Oasis

Easily, I would choose this *Passiflora* just for its beauty, but growing this vine guarantees visits from the Gulf Fritillary butterfly. This orange butterfly with black wing borders and silvery undersides will lay single yellow eggs on the young tendrils and leaf tips. Once hatched, the orange caterpillar with dark green stripes and long black spines will feed and pupate on the vine. Its chrysalis is light brown with pinkish-white patches that cleverly resemble a dead leaf.



PLANT BIT

The red passion flower, *Passiflora coccinea*, also attracts the female Gulf Fritillary. However, the caterpillars that feed on it do poorly, often not maturing into adults. Though its beautiful flowers will stop you in your tracks, avoid growing this South American tropical in your butterfly garden.

Caterpillar of the Gulf Fritillary

Adult Gulf Fritillary

Well-established vines can easily support the voracious appetites of these caterpillars, but young vines will be quickly stripped of foliage. Not to worry, *P.* ‘Amethyst’ will quickly recover with new growth and flowers to attract future generations of butterflies and garden admirers. Resist the urge to tidy this vine by trimming young growth that removes potential blooms and egg-laying sites. Instead, severely cut your vine back in early spring, and then watch your passion vine surge with renewed growth. The butterflies will flock to it.

P. ‘Amethyst’ is root hardy to Zone 9 and it does not spread like *P. incarnata*. *P.* ‘Amethyst’ is available from Biosphere Consulting Inc. of Winter Garden, FL (407-656-8277) and Boynton Botanicals of Boynton Beach, FL (800-642-1033 or 561-737-1490) — KGP

Kristin and Stephen are co-owners of Hortus Oasis in Winter Park, FL, providing garden design and garden photography services. Visit them at www.hortusoasis.com and contact them at garden@hortusoasis.com.