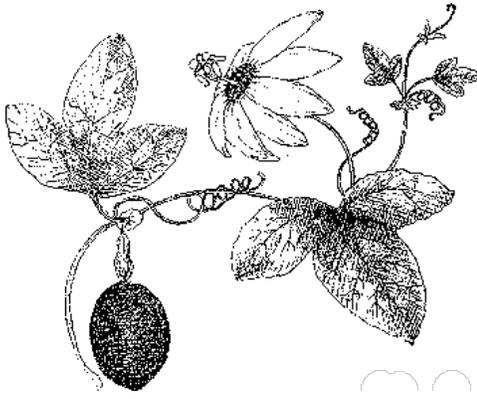


PASSIONFRUIT



South America, the passion fruit flower or passionflower was known as the 'flower of the five wounds' as the Jesuit missionaries used it in their teachings to illustrate the events in the last hours of the life of Christ. The three stigmas represent the three nails, the five anthers the five wounds (hands, feet and side of chest), the ovary which is set on a stalk represents the sponge soaked in vinegar and offered on a stick, or the hammer used to drive in the nails, the spiky corona is the crown of thorns, the five sepals and five petals represent the ten apostles (not including Judas who betrayed Jesus and Peter who denied him three times on the night of his trial) and the vine's coiling tendrils were equated with the whips...

Hence the name 'passion fruit', most usually referred to the purple fruits of *Passiflora edulis*. There are many other varieties but the purple passion fruit is the better known to most of us.

Now, I've been told - where this fruit is concerned - to ignore the lusciously smooth specimens on front display at the greengrocers, which are more expensive, and pay attention to the back of the display box where older and less attractive ones sit, neglected, with their wrinkled and sagging skin. "Beauty is skin deep" in wrinkles, these fruits are at



their prime; inside they are sweeter and juicier than the smoother, younger looking ones. Other varieties, such as the yellow passion fruit (sometimes called sweet granadilla) which only grows in the tropics or sub-tropics, is sweeter and usually eaten straight from the shell, while the purple variety often needs a touch of sugar. Another kind, known as banana passion fruit because it looks like a fat yellow banana, its seeds and juice are not quite aromatic and flavoursome but its flowers are most beautiful. There is also in today's market what is called Panama passion fruit - which includes the Panama Gold and the Panama Red - with gold and red skin respectively. This variety has larger fruits with smoother shell, the fruit tastes quite sweet even before its skin wrinkles.

But it is not just the fruits for which the passion vines are cultivated. Many are grown as ornamentals for their unique flowers, and most have the added bonus of edible fruits. Most species are frost tender and prefer a warm climate in full or half sun. Some has purple blooms up to 7cm across, some has bright crimson flowers with a creamy crown of anthers, some has amethyst-coloured blooms, some has greenish white flowers with a purple corona. The most decorative of all is probably the *passiflora quadrangularis* with large deep red flowers and bright green oval leaves; however this plant needs high humidity and high temperature to set fruit.

The best way to enjoy a passion fruit is to tear open its skin and squeeze its juice directly into one's mouth, but if one wants to be more elegant, one can halve the fruit with a serrated knife, add a dash of castor sugar and scoop its contents out with a teaspoon. Passion fruits keep well for a few days at room temperature, store for weeks under refrigeration and can be frozen whole - ready for that 'world famous' Australian pavlova, smothered in whipped cream and topped with fresh strawberries, bananas, kiwi fruits and passion fruit pulp.

The plant contains alkaloids, glycosides and flavonoids, which are non-addictive sedatives, in small doses. It has no known toxicity. According to the Encyclopaedia of Herbs published by the Royal Horticultural Society, *Passiflora incarnata* combines well with chamomile, hops and valerian for treating insomnia, anxiety and tension; with celery (*apium graveolens*) as an anti-spasmodic and anti-inflammatory treatment.

