

Plate 134 *Passiflora aurantia*

Passiflora coccinea

Thirsty Sound, south of Mackay, Queensland 29th – 31st May
1770

Bay Of Inlets, Endeavour Sound, Queensland 17th June-4
August 1770



On the Endeavour voyage, Joseph Banks saw two varieties of *Passiflora*, *P. aurantia* was seen in Australia at the Bay of Inlets in 1770 and *P. tetrandra* at Opoorage, New Zealand in 1769. Sydney Parkinson, in his reference notes describes *P. aurantia* thus, "leaves vivid grass green in small veins. The underside pale, glaucous the fruit pea green, tendrils brown. The middle lobe to make shorter."

This plant is widespread in the Western Pacific and native to New Caledonia as well as Eastern Queensland. Its flowers are short-lived, lasting only a few days. They start creamy white and turn to orange-red. Its fruits are edible but insipid; but the leaves are poisonous.

George Forster deposited a dried specimen in Banks' Herbarium, apparently collected in New Caledonia in 1774 on the second voyage. It was introduced into England in 1844 and was a popular Victorian greenhouse plant.

Passion flowers have a reputation for calming, and an infusion at bedtime will aid sleep



Naming the plant:

Spanish missionaries in the late sixteenth century in Latin America named it for the passion of Christ. They taught that the parts of the plant, including the petals, rays, and sepals, symbolized features of the passion.

In the flower of this purple-coloured fruit one can find many of the symbols of the Passion. For this reason the early Catholic missionaries saw it as a gift of God to help them in their work of teaching the Indians to understand the Passion of Christ and the Crucifixion. Even the flower colour – mostly purple in hue – was remindful of the liturgical colour of Lent. Let us look at the many symbols found in the Passion Flower:

- Its central pillar represents the column where Our Lord was so brutally flogged, and the many slender tendrils surrounding its base were likened to the cords and whips used in the Scourging.
- The three top stigma, each with a roughly rounded head, symbolize the three nails used to drive the spikes into Our Lord's flesh.
- The five anthers are symbolic of the five Sacred Wounds and the circle of filaments that compose the dramatic centre of this flower represent the Crown of Thorns.
- The rays within the flower form a nimbus, representing Our Lord's divine glory.
- The leaves on many of these plants are shaped like the spear that pierced His Heart.
- The 10 petals represent the 10 apostles who forsook their Master and fled, omitting Judas, the traitor, and St. John, who remained with Our Lady under the Cross.

A symbolic meaning was found even for the often rounded shape of the passion fruit itself: it represents 'the sinful world that Christ came to save by the supreme Sacrifice of His life.'

Ken Foster

Sources

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