

Pause for Plants July, Trumpet Creeper

The plant with bright orange trumpet-shaped flowers, currently blooming along roadsides and fence lines is Trumpet Creeper vine. This native vine is a member of the catalpa family, Bignoniaceae, and it ranges pretty much throughout the eastern United States. There are around 800 species in this family including other natives, like Cross Vine and Northern and Southern Catalpa trees. Other species of the family are found mostly in South and Central America as well as China. Trumpet Creeper's botanical name is *Campsis radicans*. The genus name *Campsis*, comes from Greek for "curved" and is descriptive of its pollen producing stamens. The species name *radicans* refers to aerial roots that grow from the twining stems, and anchor the vine to whatever it is able to climb for added height. Stem pieces will root readily. Vines can overwhelm trees and telephone poles, but they aren't generally considered threats like Kudzu or Chinese Wisteria. Horticultural varieties of trumpet creeper are now available at nurseries, and their flower colors range from deep red to apricot and yellow.



A flower's "trumpet" structure is a corolla tube, with five lobes, showing that it was formed by fusion of five petals. Two pollen-producing anthers can be seen inside at the flower's center.



Trumpet Creeper vine decorating barbed wire fence.

There are numerous, mostly positive, internet reports of trumpet creeper. But it's also commonly called "cow itch" referring to the fact that for some susceptible folks, skin contact with plant "juices" can cause a rash. So if you are doing extensive trimming or weeding of the vine, gloves might be necessary.

Trumpet Creeper is also distinguished as "number one" on a list of native species that attract ruby throated humming birds! Each flower produces an ample supply of nectar, and nurseries advertise Trumpet Creeper as "Hummingbird Vine." The sweet nectar also attracts insect pollinators. Cheating insects will even bite a hole in the base of an unopened flower to get nectar without returning the favor of pollination. Ants are usually present, cruising in and out of the blossoms.

Leaves of Trumpet Creeper are opposite; that is, arranged by twos at nodes on the stem. They are compound, with seven to fifteen coarsely toothed leaflets, so the whole leaf can be over eight inches long. Fruits produced by Trumpet Creeper are long thick pods, first green, then turning brown in the fall. They split open to release thousands of tiny (less than 1/2 inch) light winged seeds, which germinate readily. If your yard has a mature blooming vine, you'll probably have seedlings popping up all over.



Young flower buds and some older blossoms with only their female (pistils) remaining to form fruits, and two fruits(capsules) that produce LOTS of tiny winged seeds

And, did you know that some of Tiffany's objects d'art celebrate our common Trumpet Creeper! Valuable Tiffany lamps and windows feature the flower's images. The world of art appreciates these beautiful blossoms.



Trumpet Creeper inspired Tiffany lamp.

