

Trumpet Creeper

by Annette Doukas

Trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*), a fast-growing native vine, served as my career adviser. It told me with its silent leaves and hardy seeds that I was in the wrong graduate program.

I was working toward my master's degree and employment with an agrochemical company, but Dow or Monsanto wasn't my destiny.

I took a trip to Florida to bring cuttings north so I could study herbicide action on this appealing vine. I found trumpet creeper perched on a dead tree limb with its funnel-shaped, orange-scarlet flowers — with a Ruby-throated Hummingbird seeking its nectar.

Twelve hundred miles of travel and a night in my apartment never fazed trumpet creeper's propagules. I read everything I could find on the plant's biology. I actually became fond of trumpet creeper, which thrives on minimal nutrients and general care to produce a rambling vine and healthy seedlings. In ten days, over 90% of the seeds germinated in moist sand, and vines with deep green foliage grew and draped over the greenhouse.

Then the day came to spray. But — happy ending! — the plant struck back with healthy new green!

I got my master's degree, all right,

but a job with Dow was not a good fit. Steered in a different direction, I now draw, photograph, and write about plants. Trumpet creeper taught me the importance of understanding our native plants and the role they play in an ecological community. My new goal is to study and propagate endangered plants, and I owe it all to the quiet persuasion of this common vine of the southeastern United States.

Trumpet creeper is a woody perennial with a vining habit. Growth is prostrate or climbing by aerial rootlets. The 9 to 11 leaflets are oval with sharp-toothed margins. The leaves are opposite. The orange-scarlet, funnel-shaped flowers are borne 4 to 12 in a group. The female organ, the ovary, is attached above the other flower parts and the five stamens, or male organs. One of these stamens is non-functional, and two of the four are



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long and two are short. The brown, crescent-shaped capsule contains 100 to 400 light brown, wind-dispersible seeds. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds feed on the flower nectar and American Goldfinches feed on the seeds.

Trumpet creeper can cover masonry walls, tree stumps, palm trunks, and large rock outcrops. Maintenance can be accomplished by pruning. It grows in moist soil and full sun.

You can collect seeds and root cuttings from wild plants for propagation; there's no danger of trumpet creeper becoming endangered because of this practice. Maybe you'll be fortunate enough to see — or attract — a nectaring hummingbird.

Annette Doukas has a master's degree in botany from Purdue University. She lived in Florida for six years prior to moving to Wisconsin, and is a free lance science writer.