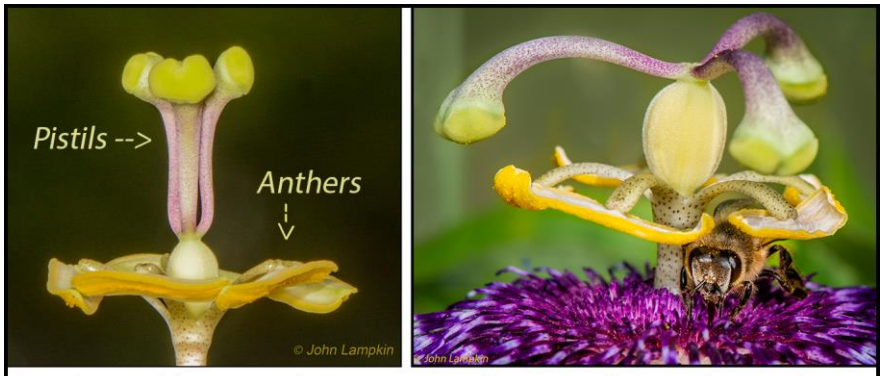
PASSION VINE
By John Lampkin



Left: Freshly opened Passionvine flower with upright pistils
Right: Older bloom with lowered pistils

Passionvines know a thing or two about gender fluidity. As with the vast majority of flowering plants, the flowers are bisexual, containing male and female organs in the same bloom. Plants have evolved a variety of ways of avoiding self-pollination, and our passionvine is no exception. Freshly opened, the female pistils are upright and well away from the tier of pollen-laden anthers. Thus, in effect the flower is in "male mode" because a visiting pollinator is likely only going to contact the anthers. As the flower matures and enters "female mode" the pistils bend down as in the photo. As pollinators arrive with a dusting of pollen from other flowers, they brush against the pistil and voila, cross-pollination!

Throughout it all, the flower pumps out nectar in the sea of fragrant purple come-and-get-me attractors beneath the organs. The honeybee above is after that sweet goo and cares not a whit about pollinating anything.

The flowers are outrageously stunning and abound in all developmental stages at the entrance to the SCC West Campus Nature Trails. The foliage is larval food for the Gulf Fritillary butterfly so Passionvines are a double delight, and delighted we are!

The Nature Trails is an ongoing project of the SCC Audubon Club in cooperation with the SCC CA. The trailhead is located opposite North Lake on Del Webb West between Vincennes and Seton Hall. Join us for interpretive walks on the first Tuesday of the month at 9 am.