

SUNNYSIDE THYMES

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“Helping Others Grow”

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Know Your Natives

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Native Vines of Kentuckiana

Tarzan, the King of the Jungle, was not a Hoosier. Out of the approximately 17,000 plant species natural to the United States, only 465 are native to Indiana, 11 of those being vines. Only a subset of these is anything one would want to swing on without consequence.

Vining plants are defined as any plant with a growth habit of trailing or climbing. They have long stems that seek to gather support from existing structure rather than put energy into supportive tissue. They can be as small as Common Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) that only climbs 6-12 inches to Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) that can climb 50 plus feet. Virginia Creeper is one of Indiana's native vining plants. The list also includes Dutchman's Pipe (*Aristolochia tomentosa*), Cross Vine (*Bignonia capreolata*), Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*), Leatherflower (*Clematis virona*), Virgin's Bower (*Clematis virginiana*), Honeyvine Milkweed (*Cynanchum laeve*), Grape Honeysuckle (*Lonicera reticulata*), Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*), American Wisteria (*Wisteria frutescens*), and everyone's favorite, Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*).



Campsis radicans

Out of our native list, a few vine varieties are suitable for cultivation in home landscapes. The first of these would be the cross vine. It is a Kentuckiana native tuber with showy, fragrant red trumpet-like flowers. The foliage of it is bright green in summer and turns to a reddish purple in winter, adding interest to any garden. It covers supports well growing up to 50 feet long if conditions are right. It prefers full sun to partial shade and can handle the inconsistent watering mother nature brings our region.

Another native useful in the home garden is the passionflower. Also called a maypop, this vine has flowers like something out of this world. They are open petal, with horizontal purple stamens and an upright, bright yellow pistil. It is a great alternative to non-native clematis, growing with a similar height/spread of 6-8 feet. Once established, it will bloom all summer until

first frost under minimal care. It requires full sun to partial shade and is drought tolerant. The bonus with this plant is that it produces green, golf ball shaped fruit that can be eaten. Some say it tastes like passion fruit.



Bignonia capreolata

As we all know, what is suitable for home landscapes is not always beneficial to our pollinator friends. If you are looking for a native vine to support as many pollinators as possible, the best one to start with is trumpet creeper. This woody vine can be found growing up trees at field edges throughout our region. Climbing up to 60 feet in height and weighing up to hundreds of pounds, this vine needs some serious support to thrive. If you are willing to accommodate, it will reward you with a plethora of pink and orange trumpet shaped flowers. These attract multiple bee, moth, and hummingbird species that dine on the nectar. The trumpet creeper is like many of our other native vines. It prefers full sun to partial shade and can tolerate most moisture levels our region produces.

If you are looking for a vine to cultivate in your garden, try giving one of our native varieties a chance. They can grow on you!

(All photos USDA Plants Database with permission)

Sources

- Indiana Native Plant Finder Tool - Indiana Native Plant Society - <https://finder.indiananativeplants.org/>
- *Thymus vulgaris* (Common Thyme, Garden Thyme, German Thyme, Thyme) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox (ncsu.edu) - <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/thymus-vulgaris/>
- <https://plants.usda.gov/home/plantfinder>



Passiflora incarnata