



## Trumpet Creeper heralds summer

By Robert Naczi

The warm days of summer bring the eye-catching blooms of the Trumpet Creeper to roadsides and gardens. The large, tubular, orange flowers are like blaring trumpets that call attention to this plant, a vine that is more a climber than a creeper. The flowers are clustered at the ends of the vines, which bear large, compound leaves.

The flowers and foliage lend an exotic appeal to this plant, an evocation that is most appropriate. The Trumpet Creeper (*Campsis radicans*) belongs to the Bignoniaceae, a family that is tremendously diverse and important in the tropics, but is known on the Delmarva Peninsula by just two other plants, Catalpa and Cross-vine.

In the tropics, close relatives of the Trumpet Creeper include tall trees of the rain forests, desert shrubs, and many vines growing in a wide variety of habitats.

The Trumpet Creeper genus is very small — only a second species is known (*Campsis grandiflora*), which occurs in eastern Asia. Nearly all members of the family have large, showy flowers. Sadly, most are not hardy in our region. Fortunately, Trumpet Creeper is a noteworthy exception.

A common wild plant, Trumpet Creeper is native to most of the eastern United States. On the Delmarva Peninsula, Trumpet Creeper grows in such diverse habitats as edges of forests, dunes, and railroad embankments.

Trumpet Creeper is easy to grow, grows quickly, and has few



Submitted photo

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pests. In addition, it blooms for most of the summer. Be careful, though, when considering it for your garden. "Shy" is not a word that applies to this plant. It has aggressive tendencies, can quickly get out of bounds, and can look disheveled if not tended.

If given the opportunity, Trumpet Creeper can overtake nearby plants that grow more slowly. Also, it will climb trees, walls, and sides of houses, if not kept in check. If, like me, you don't have much time to maintain your garden, you may regret planting Trumpet Creeper. Once it is well established, it is difficult to eradicate.

As well, contact with Trumpet Creeper flowers and foliage can cause skin irritation in people

with sensitive skin, an aspect that explains one alternative name for the plant, Cow-itch Vine.

Trumpet Creeper looks its best when covering expanses of vertical space, such as trellises, and otherwise unsightly fences, posts, and hedgerows. Another plus is that the flowers are quite attractive to hummingbirds. Many nurseries sell Trumpet Creepers.

For variety, a cultivar with yellow-orange flowers (*Flava*) and a hybrid of the American and Asian species (*Campsis* and *tagliabuana*) are also available from nurseries. If you have plenty of space, have the luxury to allow a rampant grower, and want a bold, tropical look, Trumpet Creeper may be for you.

*Editor's note: Robert Naczi is curator of the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University. For more information, call 857-6452 and 857-6450.*