In Nature's Garden

BY ELIZABETH MURRAY

Morning Glory

Illustrated by Lucile Walton

It is hard for me to extol the beauty of the morning glory when I have just come in from weeding my butternut squash patch. Down there, it is much more tempting to think of the plant by the common English name of bindweed because that describes it so suitably. It is a weed there, something in the wrong place, which is binding the poor squash vines, and because I am overdue with my weeding, it is growing prolifically and enthusiastically, to the detriment of my crop. However, in fairness, I did step back once, and take the time to admit that, anywhere other than in my vegetable garden, the flowers were lovely.

Morning glory belongs to the bindweed family, Convolvulaceae, and we have two main genera here, *Convolvulus* (or *Calystegia*) and *Ipomea*, the former mostly introduced from Europe, the latter from tropical America. The species shown here is the ivy-leaved morning glory, *Ipomea hederacea*, characterized by leaves which are deeply lobed into three parts (ivy-like).

The flowers are trumped-shaped, up to two inches long, sky-blue when they first come out and changing to a rose purple as the flower gets older, with a white throat. Occasionally the flowers are pure white. In a closely related species, *Ipomea purpurea*, the common morning glory, the flowers may be blue, red, pink, purple, white, or variegated. They are slightly larger than those of the ivy-leaved morning glory and the leaves are unlobed and heart-shaped. There is also a smaller white-flowered species, and one with scarlet blooms.

The wide variety of flower shades gives our fence rows and old fields a colorful appearance in summer and fall when the flowers are at their height. The name morning glory is apt, since the blooms open in the early morning and, if the day is bright, close up during the middle of the day. If the weather is dull, they may stay open all day, unfortunately too often the case during the rainy weather we have seen so much.

The name *Ipomea* comes from the Greek word for 'worm', *ips*, and *homoios* meaning 'resembling' and of course refers to the twining habit of the plant. It is a very vigorous and fast-growing vine, particularly in wet weather or moist habitats. The name of the family, Convolvulaceae, comes from the Latin verb *convolvere*, 'to entwine'.

The main native species here of the genus is *Ipomea pandurata*, the wild potato-vine. The yam-like root of this species was used by the Indians as a starchy vegetable from late fall to spring when the root is well-filled. However, fresh roots are reported to be purgative, so it would be advisable for those seeking sweet potatoes to stick to the ordinary cultivated species *Ipomea batatas*. The seeds of all morning glory plants are poisonous, so it is as well to stay away from them, too.

Ivy-leaved morning glory is an annual, growing new plants each year from seeds made in the late fall of the preceding year. The vines achieve an astonishing amount of growth, considering they do it all in a single season. From the weeder's point of view, the only advantage in the annual nature of the plant is that the roots are not as tenacious as those of a perennial, and hence easier to pull up! However, it is rewarding to overcome our provocation at the places where we would rather not have morning glory — and admire its varied and showy flowers in locations where it is causing no trouble.