

Plant Selection for Butterfly Gardens in Duval County

This information is intended for use in Duval County. Florida is a very diverse state with many different growing conditions. If you garden outside of Northeast Florida, check with your local UF/IFAS Extension agent for assistance.

Tonya Ashworth, UF/IFAS Extension Duval County

Butterfly Gardening

Nothing brings whimsy and fun into the garden quite like butterflies. Butterfly gardens can be a beautiful landscape feature as well as providing habitat for these beautiful insects. There are a few important features to include when planning for a successful butterfly garden. This fact sheet will focus on plant selection, but other features such as shelter and water should not be ignored.



Gulf fritillary caterpillar
Tonya Ashworth



Monarch butterfly
Tonya Ashworth

Plants and the Butterfly Life Cycle

Butterflies have a complete metamorphosis, which includes the egg, larva, pupa, and adult stages. Be sure to plan for all four stages of their lifecycle in order to have the most success with keeping butterflies on your property. The larva, or butterfly caterpillars, are very selective of their food source. They will only eat the foliage of their specific host plant(s) before they move on to the pupa stage. This means that the adult butterflies seek out the host plant(s) for their species in order to lay eggs. Be sure to include host plants to attract adult butterflies to your garden. The adults will stay in your garden even longer if you also supply plenty of nectar plants for them to feed on as well. This plant selection guide will give recommendations for both host and nectar plants. This is not an all-inclusive list of butterfly host plants. The list is intended to be useful for the average gardener starting a butterfly garden and focuses on plants that can be found for purchase.

Caterpillar Host Plants

Trees as host plants	Butterfly
Live oak (<i>Quercus virginiana</i>)	Juvenal's duskywing, White-M hairstreak, 'Southern' oak hairstreak, Horace's duskywing
White oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>)	Banded hairstreak
Winged elm (<i>Ulmus alata</i>), American elm (<i>Ulmus americana</i>)	Question mark
Southern red cedar (<i>Juniperus silicicola</i>)	'Sweadner's' juniper hairstreak
White ash (<i>Fraxinus americana</i>), Pop ash (<i>Fraxinus caroliniana</i>), Tulip poplar (<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>), Sweet bay magnolia (<i>Magnolia virginiana</i>)	Tiger swallowtail
Christmas senna (<i>Senna bicapsularis</i>)	Cloudless sulphur, orange-barred sulphur, sleepy orange
American holly (<i>Ilex opaca</i>)	Henry's elfin
Wax myrtle (<i>Myrica cerifera</i>)	Red-banded hairstreak
Chickasaw plum (<i>Prunus angustifolia</i>)	Red-spotted purple
Flowering dogwood (<i>Cornus florida</i>)	Spring azure
Paw paw (<i>Asimina spp.</i>)	Zebra swallowtail
Red bay (<i>Persea borbonia</i>)	Palamedes swallowtail, Spicebush swallowtail
Sassafrass (<i>Sassafrass albidum</i>)	Spicebush swallowtail
Willow (<i>Salix spp.</i>)	Viceroy
Wild cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)	Tiger swallowtail, Red-spotted purple

Caterpillar Host Plants

Shrubs as Host Plants	Butterfly
Hercules' club (<i>Zanthoxylum clava-herculis</i>)	Giant swallowtail
Yaupon holly (<i>Ilex vomitoria</i>)	Henry's elfin

Vines as Host Plants	Butterfly
Passionflower (<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>)	Gulf fritillary, variegated fritillary
American wisteria (<i>Wisteria frutescens</i>)	Long-tailed skipper, silver-spotted skipper
Dutchman's pipe, Pipevines (<i>Aristolochia spp.</i>)	Pipevine swallowtail
Corkstem passionflower (<i>Passiflora suberosa</i>)	Zebra longwing

Ornamental Grass as Host Plant	Butterfly
Little blue stem grass (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)	Common wood nymph and swarthy skipper

Groundcover as Host Plant	Butterfly
Perennial peanut (<i>Arachis glabrata</i>)	Barred yellow
Turkey tangle fog fruit (<i>Phyla nodiflora</i>)	Common buckeye and phaon crescent

Annuals as Host plants	Butterfly
Dill, fennel, parsley	Black swallowtail

Perennials as Host Plants	Butterfly
Twin flower (<i>Dyschoriste oblongifolia</i>)	Common buckeye
Canna lily (<i>Canna spp.</i>)	Brazilian skipper
Plumbago (<i>Plumbago auriculata</i>)	Cassius blue
Milkweeds (<i>Asclepias spp.</i>)	Monarch

Adult Butterfly Nectar Plants

Trees

Cabbage palm (*Sabal palmetto*)
Chaste Tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*)
Red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*)

Shrubs

Azalea (*Rhododendron spp.*)
Bush daisy (*Gamolepis spp.*)
Butterfly bush (*Buddleia lindleyana*)
Buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*)
Fetterbush (*Lyonia lucida*)
Firebush (*Hamelia patens*)
Rusty lyonia (*Lyonia ferruginea*)
Sweet almond bush (*Aloysia virgata*)
Yucca (*Yucca spp.*)

Vines

Coral honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)
Trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*)

Adult Butterfly Nectar Plants

Perennials

Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*)
Blanket flower (*Gaillardia pulchella*)
Blazing star (*Liatris spp.*)
Coreopsis (*Coreopsis spp.*)
Daylily (*Hemerocallis spp.*)
Firecracker plant (*Russelia equisetiformis*)
Firespike (*Odontonema strictum*)
Goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*)
Pentas (*Pentas lanceolata*)
Porterweed (*Stachytarpheta spp.*)
Coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*)
Salvia (*Salvia spp.*)
Shrimp plant (*Justicia brandegeana*)
Stoke's aster (*Stokesia laevis*)
Swamp sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*)
Guara (*Guara lindheimeri*)

Groundcovers

Beach sunflower (*Helianthus debilis*)
Mexican heather (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*)
Sunshine mimosa (*Mimosa strigillosa*)