

Butterfly Gardening

Lawn & Garden

Tips for Central Florida

The key to attracting butterflies is to plant species that butterflies can use for food and shelter. Select appropriate larval host plants for butterflies in your area and cultivate a variety of plants to provide nectar you will have butterflies year-round. Butterflies are attracted to masses of color, when possible, plant multiple of the same flower species for the best effect.

Larval Host and Nectar Plants

Larval host plants are specific to butterfly species, they are the plants that adult butterflies lay their eggs on. Caterpillars are the larvae of butterflies and when the eggs hatch the caterpillar is ready to eat its host plant. The caterpillar eats and eats until it grows large and eventually transforms into a butterfly in its chrysalis. This process is called metamorphosis. Adult butterflies are generalists and can feed on any plants that provide a sweet nectar. Milkweed is an example of a flower that is both host and nectar plant.

Watch the Webinar Recording

Video: For a deep dive into butterfly gardening in Central Florida, watch our YouTube presentation.



LINK:

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/hillsboroughco/2023/03/07/butterfly-gardening-tips-for-central-florida/>



Attract monarch butterflies with milkweeds. Credit: Andrei Sourakov

Larval Host Plants for Butterflies

TIP: To attract butterflies to your yard choose host plants for butterflies to lay their eggs on.

- Plant milkweeds for monarch butterflies, there are many different species
- For gulf fritillary and zebra longwing butterflies plant species of passionvine
- Sulphur butterflies lay their eggs on legume plants including cassia and senna
- The buckeye butterfly has a variety of larval host plants including Carolina petunia, false foxglove and Indian plantain
- Plant the groundcover, frog fruit also called fog fruit, for the white peacock butterfly
- Oak trees are host for hairstreak butterflies

Have plant questions? Call or email our Help Desk at hillsmsg@mail.ufl.edu or 813-744-5519.

Creating Habitat for Butterflies

Butterflies also need shelter from wind and predators so it's a good idea to plant a variety of plants with different heights. In Florida-Friendly Landscaping (FFL) we call this concept vertical layering. Shrubs, vines and trees can add some height to your Central Florida garden include firebush, giant milkweed, jatropha, red maple and coral honeysuckle vine.

It's a good idea to include Florida native wildflowers too in your planting, as these plants have co-evolved with our native species of butterflies.



The buckeye butterfly nectars on purple vervain. Credit: Chris Weber

Nectar Plants for Butterflies

Plant nectar-rich flowers to attract and feed butterflies. Using their proboscis, a tube-like mouth part, butterflies draw nectar from flowers. Sugars in nectar give butterflies the energy to fly around, mate, and lay eggs.

- Easy nectar plants to start from seed include coreopsis, cosmos, zinnias, phlox, and marigolds
- Perennial nectar plants such as porterweed, salvia, lantana, milkweed, pentas, and horsemint live longer and are more drought-tolerant
- Long lasting are shrubs can provide a lot of nectar year-round with minimal care. Good choices include firespike, firebush, cassia, jatropha, bottlebrush and chaste tree
- Plant trees can also provide nectar and safe hiding places for butterflies such as plant red maple, coral bean, wild cherry and buttonbush
- Don't forget about vines, which can flower abundantly, including native coral honeysuckle, passionvine, and Carolina jessamine

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