

Attracting Butterflies: The Basics

Urban Horticulture

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Who doesn't like to see butterflies flitting about? Attracting butterflies to your landscape is as easy as creating a welcoming environment. Florida has over 180 verified butterfly species representing some 170 native or newly established species! As far as butterfly species in Pinellas County, we're in Region 4, so we attract certain species for our climate conditions. Selecting plants native to your area will offer the best chance for attracting butterflies and for the plant's success as well! A wide mix of flower colors, shapes, and sizes provides appealing and accessible food to a greater number of butterfly species. It also makes your garden more eye-catching.

All butterflies have a life cycle consisting of four distinct stages: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis), and adult. The stage in their life cycle is what determines what plants they need.



FIGURE 1. CREDITS: CREATIVE COMMONS

Butterflies tend to stay in an area that provides options for all of their life stages, so select your plants with that in mind. Some butterflies have very specific plant needs, so choose their favorites to have the best chance of attracting those species. Some things to keep in mind:

- Food source for the adult butterflies – these plants provide nectar which is their food
- Food source for the caterpillars – these plants provide food for the larval (or caterpillar) stage
- Access to water – a bird bath, a fountain; remember to keep the water fresh
- Butterflies also use plants for shelter, a place to lay their eggs, and places for the pupa (chrysalis) to grow.
- You should avoid using chemical pesticides on your plants as butterflies are very sensitive to them in all of their life stages. In some cases, it's fatal to them.
- Avoid non-native plants, they may take over and eliminate the natives!

As an example, let's take a closer look at plants for the Monarch butterfly, (*Danaus plexippus*)

Native Nectar Plants for Monarchs in South Florida

Mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)
Cat's tongue (*Melanthera nivea*)
False blazing star (*Carphephorus corymbosus*)
Flat-topped golden rod (*Euthamia caroliniana*)
Yellow top (*Flaveria linearis*)
Goldenrod (*Solidago fistulosa*, *odora* var. *chapmanii*,
sempervirens or *stricta*)
Spanish needles (*Bidens alba* or *bipinnata*)
Blazing star (*Liatris garberi*, *gracilis*, or *chapmanii*)
Climbing aster (*Symphotrichum carolinianum*)
Hempvine (*Mikania cordifolia*)
Scorpiontail (*Heliotropium angiospermum*)
Crownbeard (*Verbesina virginica*)



FIGURE 2. CREDITS: CREATIVE COMMONS

Native Larval Host Plants for Monarchs in South Florida

Curtiss' milkweed (*Asclepias curtisii*)
Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)
Fewflower milkweed (*Asclepias lanceolata*)
Longleaf milkweed (*Asclepias longifolia*)
Savannah milkweed (*Asclepias pedicellata*)
Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)
Whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)
Green antelopehorn (*Asclepias viridis*)
White vine (*Sarcostemma clausum*)



FIGURE 3. CREDITS: CREATIVE COMMONS

For more information:

Butterfly Gardening in Florida

By Jaret C. Daniels, Joe Schaefer, Craig N. Huegel, and Frank J. Mazzotti

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW05700.pdf>

Native Habitats for Monarch Butterflies in South Florida

Rebecca G. Harvey, Patricia L. Howell, Carol Morgenstern, and Frank J. Mazzotti

<https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/UW/UW31100.pdf>

Factsheet Layout by Kaitlin Hammersley, Master Gardener, UF/IFAS Extension, Pinellas County

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