



March 2024

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UPCOMING EVENTS

**Spring Festival of Flowers
UF/PSC Milton Campus**

April 4—6

**2024 MGV Plant Sale
Milton Extension Office
SEE FLYER ON**

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Creeping Phlox

Lois Scott, SRCMGV



Phlox subulata,

Creeping Phlox, also called moss pink is one of my favorite plants to grow in our area. When it is not in bloom, the plant is green all year long, even in the coldest winters of NW Florida. Amazingly, the bloom time is a full three months long.

Starting in February the flowers will begin their show and will not quit until sometime in April. Even when your lawn is still dormant and brown, Creeping Phlox is in bloom with a vibrant show of color. In our area it is often a bright pink (as pictured) but it also can be found in red, lavender and white.

Phlox subulata is its botanical name. It slowly grows to form a mat up to 6" high and as wide as you let it grow. It is great as a border edging, in a rock garden or cascading over the edge of a container. I like to plant daffodils and plant creeping phlox over them. They will bloom at about the same time with a spectacular show.

The care of this plant could not be easier. It is not fussy about a particular type of soil. For best flowering it likes full sun (6 hours of direct sun a day) but "mostly sunny" will do. Regular watering will make it grow thick and lush but I have seen it grow in neglected places and the phlox still gave a fairly good bloom.

It has been my personal observation that it is best to avoid planting Creeping Phlox in hot summer temperatures. When you want to increase your phlox dig out a small portion and replant. Do this in the cool weather of fall since it will need time to settle in before its early bloom time in February.



For more information contact: UF/IFAS Extension Santa Rosa County

Josh Criss via email at joshua.criss@ufl.edu ▪ (850) 623-3868

After blooming it is beneficial to give the phlox a “hair cut” carefully using a string trimmer or hand shears. This encourages thick growth. Keep an eye out for Creeping Phlox in nurseries in late winter/early spring. Better yet, find a neighbor who will most gladly give you a small clump to start your own spring flower garden.

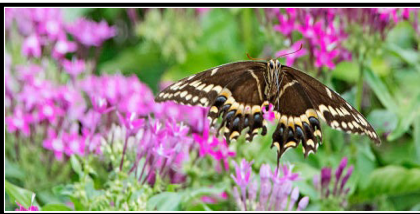
References: ifas fact sheet FPS 476

<https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/plants/ornamentals/phlox.html>

Photo credits: Lois Scott



Phlox blooming in late March .
Notice that the lawn has not fully come out of dormancy.



Designing a Butterfly Garden

Mary Salinas, SRC Horticultural Extension Agent, Retired

Butterflies are not only beautiful to look at in your landscape; they serve as important pollinators of your fruiting plants. Attracting them to your garden and incorporating some features to get them to stay and reproduce involves a little planning ahead of time for optimum results.

Choose a location that provides some protection from wind. Trees and shrubs that provide wind protection also serve as a safe harbor from rain and predators. The garden should be mostly sunny with some part sun areas. Ensure that any new plantings have access to a convenient irrigation source so they can be successfully established and maintained in good health.

Now you'll need to choose the plants. Adults feed on the nectar of many flowering trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals and, fortunately, there are usually many choices that will meet your site requirements and your taste preferences. In order to keep the butterflies in your garden, certain plants need to be available to serve as host plants for their young. Determine which species of butterfly is common in your area and that you want to attract. Most species have very few plants on which the caterpillars can feed so those host plants need to be chosen wisely. Determine whether any of the plants you already have are host plants and they can be integrated into your butterfly garden. For example, cassia is a host plant for the Cloudless Sulphur and citrus is a host plant for the Giant Swallowtail.



Cloudless Sulphur butterfly
on a Penta plant,
Photo: Ed Reschke,
Gettyimages

In choosing your nectar plants, select those that are native or Florida-Friendly as they are lower maintenance, giving you less trouble in the long run. Choose plants that have flowers in a variety of color, size, and shape. Different butterflies like to feed at different elevations, so choose trees, shrubs, perennials, and annuals of varying heights. In order to have nectar available throughout the time when the butterflies occur, include plants that bloom at different times of the year. And include some plants that bloom all the time, like pentas or moss verbena. Larger plants should be placed in the background with smaller plants layered in the foreground. When you plant smaller annuals and perennials, place them in masses to better attract the butterflies. Consider placing host plants in an area that is in close proximity to the nectar plants, but in an area of your garden that is not a focal point. Host plants can get quite ragged looking from hungry caterpillars!

Good maintenance practices will enhance the health of your garden. Regular fertilization and irrigation if needed will help keep your plants in bloom and healthy. Healthy plants are less susceptible to disease and pests. Avoid pesticides as they may harm the very creatures you are trying to attract. Never use a Bt or systemic pesticide. If you must, target a pest with lower risk oils or soaps and then only treat the affected plants. Lastly, be aware of beneficial insects that will help you achieve satisfactory control of a pest.



Moss Verbina
Photo: Ed Reschke,
Gettyimages

Now that your plants are placed there are several things to do to make your butterfly garden complete. Add a spot where water can puddle on the ground for the adult butterflies to drink. They require minerals from the soil that get dissolved in the water. Also add a rock or log in a sunny spot where butterflies can rest and sun themselves. And consider placing a comfortable place for you to sit and enjoy the beauty of your garden and its inhabitants!



Coreopsis,
Florida's State
Flower

Remedy for the Winter Doldrums

Ellie Mascara, SRCMGV

Are you suffering from a case of winter doldrums? If your garden looks anything like mine, I can understand why. The cold temperatures that we experienced this winter played havoc with most of my plants. As I look out my window, I'm confronted with crumbled brown leaves that show absolutely no signs of life. Despite the sad state of my garden, I do have hope. Just recently, I saw a robin searching for worms in my yard. That's surely a sign that spring is in the air.

I'm witnessing another telltale sign of spring. It seems as though the bulbs that I planted last fall are really thriving this year. The cold snap is just what they needed to perform at their best. I have a container of beautiful red and white tulips that made their debut last week. It seems a little early, but I can enjoy them anytime of the year. The daffodils are not far behind them. Each day, they push their way a little further through the soil so that now I can see the buds forming. There is nothing like a container of bright yellow daffodils to brighten up your day!

Seeing these promising signs, I'm getting ready for my spring ritual. I'll be putting out some new bluebird nesting boxes and cleaning out the old ones. I'll get rid of the debris that has fallen in the garden, assessing the over-all condition of my plants and making a list of those that need to be replaced. Since I'm gradually moving toward a garden that is biologically diverse, I hope to be able to purchase more native plants and that of course means planting more wildflowers.

After looking over several publications, I've developed my own list of things I'd like in my garden. I hope that it is helpful, especially for those of you who are considering planting native species.

Please see my list on the next page. Happy Gardening!

The information for this article was taken from
[Wildflowers of Georgia and Surrounding States](#) by Linda G. Chafin.

Native Plants for the Florida Panhandle

Ellie Mascara

Flowers

Swamp Milkweed -White; full to part sun; up to 18 inches tall; grows well in sandy, dry areas. Plant can tolerate dry to moist soils. It is the host plant for monarchs.

Purple Coneflower-Purple; full to part sun; tolerates dry to moist soils; 15 inches tall; attracts pollinators. →



Photo: Purple coneflower- Khara Woods

Black-eyed Susan- Yellow; full to part sun; 15 inches; seeds eaten by birds; tolerates dry to moist soils; attracts pollinators.

Stokes Aster- Blue; full to part sun; tolerates dry to moist soil; attracts pollinators.

Indian Blanket- Orange and yellow; full sun; can tolerate dry soil; 15 inches; attracts pollinators and butterflies. →

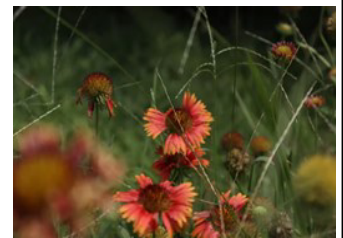


Photo: Indian blanket flower -Ankit Swetav, unsplash

Spider Lily-White; grows near streams; likes moist soil; 14inches; shade. Opens late in the day and withers the following afternoon.

Coreopsis- Bright yellow flowers; many varieties and heights.

Shrubs

Coontie- evergreen; tolerates sun, part sun and shade; salt tolerant; good seaside shrub. Host plant for Atila butterflies.

Hibiscus- several colors; sun and shade; tolerates dry to moist soil; deciduous; hummingbirds and pollinators.

Oakleaf hydrangea- White flowers; deciduous; 6ft. tall 8 ft. wide; large leaves resembling oak leaves that turn crimson in the fall.; prefers shade. →

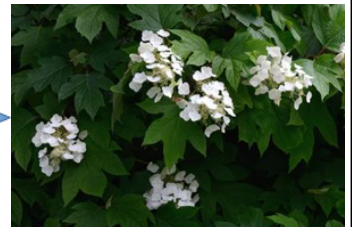
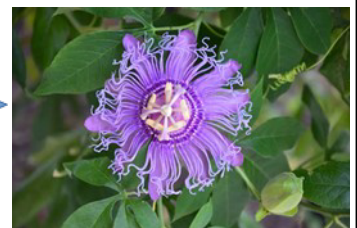


Photo: Oakleaf Hydrangea : Juergen Pfeiffer

Vines

Purple Passion Vine- full sun; tolerates dry to moist conditions; deciduous; host plant to gulf fritillary, and variegated fritillary. →

Photo: Purple passion vine: Chaoitctoejam, unsplash



Grasses

Muhlygrass- pink flowers primarily in fall; full sun; 2 to 4 ft.; attracts beneficial insects; provides wildlife cover.



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Where can I find more information?

The UF/IFAS Extension Solutions for Your Life website and Gardening Solutions website offer online material, including pre-recorded webinars and videos, that can be accessed at your convenience.

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/lawn-and-garden/>

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/>

In addition, we have our Master Gardener webinar page and our Gardening in the Panhandle web archives full of educational content.

<https://gardeningolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/mastergardener/volunteers/education/webinars.html>

<http://nwdistrict.ifas.ufl.edu/hort/>

For a listing of local offices visit:

<https://sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office/>

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