

Butterflyscaping for Florida-Friendly Communities

Terra Freeman
Urban and Commercial Horticulture Agent
UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County

Butterflyscaping:

Home to 170 native butterfly species with 40 considered unique to the state, Florida has the highest butterfly diversity of any state east of the Mississippi, making Florida a premier location for butterfly gardens and gardeners! Butterflies are considered an umbrella species, meaning they are an important factor for making conservation-related decisions; protecting butterflies indirectly protects many other species that share their habitat. Planting butterfly and other pollinator-friendly gardens in home landscapes helps to offset habitat loss throughout the state. Expanding habitat beyond the individual landscape can create an even larger impact for pollinator conservation.

Opportunities to expand butterfly habitat beyond the home landscape include adding wildflowers and other native butterfly-attracting plants to common areas such as open fields, stormwater ponds, swales, and other undeveloped areas. It can be as simple as creating “no mow” areas where wildflower seeds are planted among the Bahai grass, or allowing native plantings to expand from the woodland edge to provide “edge habitat” for butterflies, birds and other pollinators. Butterfly gardens with more thoughtful design can be created for high profile areas, such as neighborhood entrances or next to playgrounds.

Embracing the practice of expanding pollinator habitat to common areas throughout the community can lower maintenance costs through reduction of irrigation, fertilizer, pesticides, and mowing, making the community more Florida-Friendly. When sustainable landscaping practices are implemented, water quality and quantity are conserved and protected. This is of paramount importance in our state which uses up to 60% of available potable water to irrigate landscapes.

Plant selection:

Native plants are the most sustainable plant palette for butterfly gardens. Native pollinators have co-evolved with native flora, creating a symbiotic relationship that has helped both to survive; native plants are pollinated while pollinators are nourished by food sources that provide the highest level of nutrition. When planted in landscapes that are similar to their natural habitats, native plants will thrive once established with minimal inputs.

Butterflies require both host and nectar plants. Adult butterflies lay their eggs on host plants, which feed the larvae once hatched. Many host plants also serve as nectar sources, which adult butterflies feed on. To attract a specific type of butterfly, be sure to plant their required host plants. Many resources are available to research host plants for specific butterflies; refer to “Resources for Butterfliescaping”.



Figure 1: Tickseed/*Coreopsis lanceolata*



Figure 2. Stokes Aster/*Stokesia laevis*



Figure 3: Gayfeather/*Liatris spicata*

Butterfly habitat includes resources beyond plants, such as nutrient-rich compost or soil for “puddling”. Butterflies require minerals from the soil that dissolve in water. While this happens naturally following a rainfall, they need mud puddles to drink from that have not been treated with pesticide or herbicide. Native fruit such as persimmon, blackberries, blueberries, and muscadine grapes contribute to butterfly nutrition as well. When the fruit falls to the ground and starts to decompose, butterflies use the rotting fruit as another source of nutrients to meet their energy demands.

For examples of butterfly garden design and plant selection, you are welcome to visit our UF/IFAS Extension St. Johns County butterfly demonstration garden during daylight hours. Our garden is lush with native plants, including Stokes Aster (*Stokesia laevis*), Bee balm (*Monarda punctata*), Gayfeather (*Liatris spicata*), Pennyroyal (*Piloblephis rigida*), Tickseed (*Coreopsis lanceolata*), and Creeping Sage (*Salvia misella*).



Figure 4: Butterfly Garden UF/IFAS Extension SJG

Community associations and HOAs are in prime position to work with homeowners to support butterfly conservation efforts while improving the overall sustainability of their landscape. Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ practices can be exemplified through community efforts, which can educate and encourage homeowners to adopt sustainable landscaping practices as well.

References:

Community Butterfyscaping: How to Move Beyond Butterfly Gardening to create a large-scale butterfly habitat: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/EP420>

Resources for Butterfyscaping:

Gardening for Butterflies: <https://gardeningsolutions.ifas.ufl.edu/design/types-of-gardens/butterfly-gardens.html>

EDIS Butterfly Gardening in Florida: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/UW057>

Native Plants that Benefit Native Wildlife in the Florida Panhandle: <https://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/uw384>

Florida Wildflower Foundation: <https://www.flawildflowers.org/>

Florida Association of Native Nurseries: <https://www.fann.org/>

Florida Native Plant Society: <https://www.fnps.org/>