

## Love our Butterfly Garden? Want your Own?

More butterfly gardens needed! One butterfly garden every 50 miles or so will not support a strong butterfly population. They need lots of stopping and feeding places within an easy day's flight, so the more butterfly-friendly plantings and gardens we have, the better. It is easy - if you have some garden space, you can do it here in Florida year round, and you can have one at your northern home in the summer as well. You can do it the easy way - just add butterfly-friendly plants to your existing landscaping, using trees, shrubs and perennials. Or you can dedicate a garden area, using more colorful annuals as well.

Some basic essentials:

- a sunny location, both for the butterflies and for the plants
- temperatures above 65 F at least part of the day
- some protection from strong winds - bushes or trellises will do;
- no pesticides, no matter what the provocation
- nectar plants with lots of color, planted in clusters, not isolated patches
- larva plants for the caterpillars to eat, clustered to supply large numbers at once
- woody bushes to provide shelter for the hanging pupas or chrysalises
- an irrigation system
- water that is accessible to butterflies, e.g. in pan of pebbles or sand

### Kinds of Plants

Your local nursery may have lists of butterfly-friendly plants, or they may label plants on display as butterfly-friendly. You can also find lots of help in books and on line. When planning new or renewed landscaping, ask your contractor or nursery supplier to pick trees and shrubs that are butterfly-friendly, as well as beautiful. There are dozens to choose from here in Florida, and many in the north as well; among them are Firebush, Cassia, Porterweed,, Ixora, Hibiscus, Duranta, Buddleia, and many more. In this way you can have a low-maintenance butterfly garden without doing anything different, except in plant selection.

If you are planting a full-fledged butterfly garden, you will want to provide the essentials above, and select two kinds of plants: nectar and larva. You will need a variety of colorful nectar-rich plants for butterflies, plus several kinds of very specific green plants for the larva or caterpillars, which are particular in their eating habits, each species having its own often-unique preference. You will have to be tolerant when it comes to the larva plants, for they may be eaten away from time to time. If that happens, don't spray, just keep replacing them as needed.

You will also want to vary sizes, from ground cover such as verbena, to bedding plants like Pentas and Lantana, shrubs such as those mentioned above, and trellis-climbing vines such as passion vine and Dutchman's pipe.

If the plants you select have different watering needs, you may want to have lighter and heavier watering zones in your garden. Scorpion Tail, for example, likes to be dry, and could probably survive completely free of irrigation, while Water Hemlock loves soggy ground such as at the edge of a pond.

Once you get the garden started, don't believe the popular myth that we don't have seasons in Florida. After the last winter cold snap has passed by is the time to prune back your shrubs heavily, and replace any plants that are too far gone. Many of the bedding plants, although nominally perennial, need to be replaced every year or two if they get too leggy or woody. This can be done year round, but is especially necessary in fall, after the summer heat-kill, and in spring, after the winter-kill. Choose your bedding plants according to the season; some do better in heat and rain, and others prefer the drier cooler winters. Start fertilizing in spring, and use slow release granules a few times over the summer to replace nutrients washed away by the heavy summer rains. If summer or fall storms bring salt damage, flush with lots of fresh water and replace any that don't survive well.

Once the weather turns hot, keep the weeds down (this of course is an endless year-round job, but watch out in summer!) and remove dead flowers. Keep pruning of shrubs and plants to a minimum, if possible - even though it's a jungle out there in the Florida summer. This is time the butterflies are most numerous, and laying eggs. The caterpillars are busy eating and then metamorphosing inside their chrysalises into butterflies. The less you prune in the hot weather, the less likely you are to throw precious eggs, tiny caterpillars, and chrysalises onto the compost pile. Keep fertilizing and trimming until December. Then stop both, so you don't encourage new growth which will especially be susceptible to the cold. Maintain things until spring, and then start over.