

Butterflies Are All The Buzz



It's awesome to see! More and more property owners are doing their own research and educating themselves on environmentally-friendly landscapes and gardening practices before they even contact a landscape design professional. In my consultations, I'm getting more questions about ways to reduce impacts on the environment - a conversation I love having!

One suggestion I offer to many Southwest Florida residents is a butterfly garden. Since our area has a year-round growing season, residents with butterfly gardens can enjoy various migrating butterfly species throughout the year.

BENEFITS OF A BUTTERFLY GARDEN

Butterfly gardens support numerous species including pollinating honeybees, migratory and local bird species, and beneficial insects. Enjoy year-round vivid color, seasonal blooms, and fluctuation of species frequenting the garden. Consider incorporating a meandering path throughout the garden for strolling, and a seat bench for observing.

Butterfly gardens can be composed of all native species, a mix of native and tropical exotics, or can serve a dual purpose such as supporting pollination of fruit trees like mango, avocado, and star fruit as well as citrus trees species. The dual-purpose garden is one of the most productive types of gardens as the butterflies and bees not only feed on the butterfly plantings but also serve to pollinate the blooming citrus and edibles within the gardens.

Reduce the use of fertilizer, herbicide, and pesticide within your butterfly garden. Note: Do not spray butterfly plantings with insecticides or herbicides as these chemicals will kill larvae, caterpillars and adult butterflies, along with other pollinators like honeybees.

UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE ASKING FOR WHEN YOU WANT A BUTTERFLY GARDEN.

Order in the Garden! Most butterfly plants

look like weeds and some actually are weeds that are beneficial species to the garden environment. While butterfly gardens can be maintained and kept tidy, they tend to look a bit wispy and carefree as that is the growth habit of many plants within the garden.

Smart, knowledgeable design of plant species selection and spacing can help a great deal. Design principles such as focusing on a color theme, plant shape and form, plant massing, creation of strong lines in the garden and layering of plantings can bring composure to the garden. Formality can be brought to the garden by incorporating hedges that are clipped to a formal shape and intermingling structured shrubs like gardenias, Japanese blueberry, Ligustrum and magnolias.

Do not panic when whole plants or species of plants have been trimmed bare of leaves to the stalk... plants are used for shelter, food, and protection. Just weeks after a recent butterfly garden installation, the client called frantic that all of the butterfly milkweeds had been eaten bare to the stalks! I was happy to inform them that they were the proud parents of a new brood of Monarchs!

BEST CONDITIONS FOR BUTTERFLY GARDENS ON SANIBEL:

- **FULL SUN** – I cannot emphasize this point enough – 99% of blooming plants in Florida require full sun! Butterflies and bees like blooms and color. Keep canopy trees trimmed back or thinned so that sunlight can filter to the ground below.
- **Protection from Wind** – Sanibel is a barrier island and the gusty windstorms off of the Gulf of Mexico can be difficult for butterflies to navigate. Locate the garden in an area protected from direct winds, on the landward side of the dune or front of a home if located on the beach.

- **Incorporate plants for all four of the butterfly life cycles:** egg, caterpillar, pupa, butterfly
- **Water Source** – shallow depressions on the surface of rocks that collect rainwater or morning dew, or a water feature will allow butterflies a place to pool.
- **Butterfly feeding station** - Some Butterflies are attracted to fruit and will feed on overripe bananas or other garden edibles.

PLANT IT AND THEY WILL COME!

Every garden in which I have planted butterfly host plants has attracted butterflies within just a matter of a few days. Think it's too good to be true? I challenge you to plant a small butterfly garden in a sunny, protected location on your property!

SPECIES TO CONSIDER TREE/SHRUBS

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|------------------|---------------------|
| Jamaican Caper * | Red Jatropha |
| Firebush * | Dombeya or Tropical |
| Citrus trees | Hydrangea |
| Sweet Almond | Gingers |

SMALL SHRUB/GROUNDCOVERS

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|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Florida Coontie * ** | Spotted Beebalm* |
| Butterfly Milkweed* & Swamp Milkweed* | Blue Plumbago ** |
| Blue Porterweed * | Gaillardia * |
| Red Salvia * | Powderpuff Mimosa * |
| | Sweet Alyssum |

VINES

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Dutchman's Pipe Vine | Purple Passion Flower |
| Corky Stem Passion Flower * | |

(*) denotes native (**) denotes host plant

IN THE YARD



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