

SUSTAINABILITY

Butterfly Gardens

Benefiting nature, enhancing the community

by Tia Silvasy
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Buckeye butterfly on purpletop verbena.



Monarch butterfly on zinnia.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA/INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES

Butterfly gardening is growing in popularity and is an easy way to provide food for wildlife and offset habitat loss in the state. It allows us to get inspired by nature, do our part to preserve and enhance habitat, and spend some quiet time away from our hectic lives. Plus, seeing a butterfly skip through a garden will inevitably bring a smile to those young and old.

Florida has over 200 species of butterflies that can be easily attracted by planting food for the adult butterflies and their caterpillars. To create a well-designed butterfly garden, be sure to include adult nectar sources, larval (also known as caterpillars) host plants, shelter and a water source.

GETTING STARTED

Here are a few steps to get started with a butterfly garden in your backyard or within your city.

First, choose a location with full sun. Ideally, a minimum garden size would be 5' x 5' to accommodate five to 10 plant species. However, butterfly gardens can be scaled to any size.

Second, plant larval host plants and adult butterfly nectar plants. If you had to choose just one plant to start with, it should be milkweed. Milkweed provides

food for monarch caterpillars and butterflies, so they can complete their entire life cycle on a milkweed plant.

PLANT SELECTION

Choose a variety of native and non-native plants to provide color and food year-round. Many larval host plants are natives, as they have coevolved with butterflies and depend on each other for survival and reproduction. Native plants are adapted to Florida's unique conditions and can survive with minimal water, fertilizer and pesticides.

Excellent choices of native plants for the butterfly garden include coreopsis (Florida's state wildflower) that blooms in the spring, black-eyed Susan for summer and Liatris for fall color. Passionvine is another larval host plant (for the Gulf fritillary and zebra longwing butterflies). It can be grown on a trellis or arbor structure to support the vine.

Complement these natives with non-native annuals and perennials such as zinnias, cosmos and marigolds to provide year-round nectar sources to attract and nourish adult butterflies.

For larger areas, plant a group of three or five of the same plant together for a stunning visual impact. Butterflies like large flat flowers and are most attracted

to the colors red, orange, yellow and purple. Plant tall species such as firebush, firespike and plumbago in the back of the garden to capture the most sun and create a simple layered effect.

CITY BUTTERFLY GARDENS

Why not go big? Think beyond flowers and incorporate grasses, shrubs and trees to provide food and shelter for butterflies.

Many cities are creating pollinator gardens in their green spaces. Adding diversity to our community landscapes will help create habitats for our pollinators, birds including hummingbirds, and bees. Community ButterflyScaping is a concept that involves installing plants for butterflies throughout the community to create a continuous wildlife corridor. This presents opportunities for government officials, developers and homeowners to increase awareness of butterflies in their neighborhoods.

Butterflies are not only beautiful to look at, but they also serve as indicators of the health of our environment. Remember that caterpillars are a precursor of butterflies, so a little bit of munching should be welcome and expected.

Don't spray pesticides on butterfly plants as even organic pesticides can harm these delicate creatures. Add

finishing touches such as a water feature or shallow dish with pebbles to hold water. Follow Florida-Friendly Landscaping practices. Add 2-3 inches of mulch, irrigate efficiently and fertilize appropriately to ensure the success of your garden in an environmentally friendly way.

Butterflies benefit our ecosystem and also provide enjoyment, observation and opportunities for photography. Even a small garden can provide a haven for butterflies.

For more information on butterfly garden design, contact your local UF/IFAS

Extension county office. To find your office, visit sfyl.ifas.ufl.edu/find-your-local-office.

Tia Silvasy is an agent for the Florida-Friendly Landscaping Program at the University of Florida/IFAS Extension Orange County. **SC**

Auburndale's Rotary Butterfly Garden



Butterfly sculpture at the garden's entrance.



Garden class.

by Communications Manager Seth Teston, City of Auburndale

Auburndale's Rotary Butterfly Garden was constructed between March and June 2019. It was given its name due to the philanthropic efforts of the Auburndale Rotary Club, which donated \$20,000 to the project. Along with funding from the **Auburndale Community Redevelopment Agency**, the two entities helped to create a park amenity that has brought color and quality to Auburndale's Downtown City Park.

Two community plots in the garden are dedicated to Auburndale High School's Interact Club and Florida Polytechnic University's Rotaract Club. Both groups are sponsored by the Rotary Club, and members have helped with garden maintenance. The two plots were constructed with materials provided by CSX to resemble sections of the same railroad that runs through the Downtown City Park, just 20 yards away.

The city also partnered with the local University of Florida/IFAS office, which has presented classes at the butterfly garden and helped approve the design of the flower beds. So far, IFAS has held six classes that attracted residents from Auburndale and the surrounding areas of Polk County.

DeLand – Florida's First Monarch City USA



Monarch in the garden.



Monarch City USA proclamation.

by City Forester Mariellen J. Calabro, DeLand Public Works

The **City of DeLand** has embraced butterflies. Nearly a billion monarch butterflies have vanished since 1990, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. To help support monarch butterflies, in 2018, DeLand became Florida's first Monarch City USA. There are now nine Monarch Cities in the state. To become a Monarch City USA, cities publicly proclaim their commitment to helping monarch butterflies survive and encourage citizens to plant milkweed and nectar gardens.

Since becoming a Monarch City USA, the Monarch Circle of the DeLand Garden Club was created, and a certification program was developed for butterfly gardens. There are more than 150 certified monarch butterfly sanctuaries in DeLand. Monarchs have been celebrated at DeLand's annual Wildflower Festival and Christmas Parade, and several butterfly gardens were created on city property.

Even during the pandemic, the Butterfly Squad has continued to certify butterfly sanctuaries and provide milkweed to DeLand residents to feed their hungry caterpillars.

Mount Dora Nunan Butterfly Garden



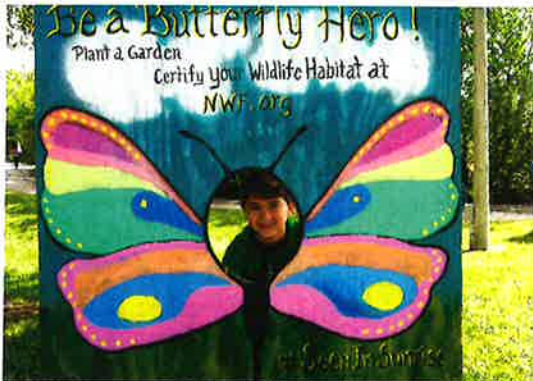
by Library Manager Cathy Lunday, City of Mount Dora

The **Nunan Butterfly Garden** was completed in 2017. It was presented as a gift to the **City of Mount Dora** by the **Mount Dora Library Association**. The one-acre property features a color wheel made of plants, a water fountain and a shaded pavilion. It is open daily year-round to the public. Volunteers work alongside city Parks Department employees to maintain the garden, which is composed of 75% native plants and 100% pollinator-friendly plants.

The adjacent W.T. Bland Public Library holds numerous community events in the garden. A Butterfly Release is held every spring, followed by a plant swap, poetry readings, a Halloween costume party and a Christmas concert and book giveaway. The garden is a regular feature of one of the library's popular story times, with children learning songs and rhymes inside the library, followed by a guided activity outdoors. Volunteers regularly contribute garden pictures on the library's Facebook page, and residents and visitors stroll its grounds every day.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF MOUNT DORA

Sunrise Be A Butterfly Hero Program



by Sustainability Officer Carrie Kashar, City of Sunrise

The **Sunrise Be A Butterfly Hero Program** began in 2016 and has grown to more than 130 butterfly hero homes in the city. The program promotes the protection of natural resources by encouraging residents and businesses to install butterfly-friendly landscapes using native Florida-friendly plants that also support local wildlife.

In the past two years, the city held five community workshops focused on gardening for butterflies and birds, attended by 156 participants. Special programming is offered to Sunrise schools to establish or augment butterfly gardens on their campuses. The program also provides outdoor learning for the students and volunteer opportunities to install demonstration gardens. Over 160 residents helped install butterfly gardens and bird habitats at city facilities for hands-on learning and beautification.

Residents are encouraged to certify their garden through the National Wildlife Federation, which acknowledges them with a certificate. If residents attend one of the workshops or special events and show proof of certification, they receive a free yard sign as well as butterfly-friendly plants and seeds.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY OF SUNRISE

Resources

- ▶ Florida-Friendly Landscaping plant selection and landscape design guide. bit.ly/3jzTt4U.
- ▶ Community ButterflyScaping. edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ep420.
- ▶ Butterfly Gardening in Florida. bit.ly/2Z29X5n.
- ▶ Florida Museum butterfly search. bit.ly/3hTW7cO.