



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Asclepias curassavica*¹

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Introduction

Butterfly weed is a member of the milkweed family native to Florida, and by some reports, the only *Asclepias* that does consistently well in south Florida (Fig. 1). The plant can be grown as an annual flower or as a perennial. The plants grow to two- to four-feet-tall and flower from spring until fall. The flower colors are red and orange borne in clusters at the top of the plant. Butterflies can usually be seen flying around the plant and visiting the flowers.

General Information

Scientific name: *Asclepias curassavica*

Pronunciation: ass-KLEE-pee-us kur-uh-SAV-ick-uh

Common name(s): Butterfly-Weed, Milkweed, Silkweed

Family: *Asclepiadaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous; annual

USDA hardiness zones: 4 through 10 (Fig. 2)

Planting month for zone 7: Jun; Jul

Planting month for zone 8: May; Jun; Jul; Aug

Planting month for zone 9: Mar; Apr; May; Jun; Jul; Aug; Sep

Planting month for zone 10 and 11: Feb; Mar; Apr; May; Jun; Jul; Aug; Sep; Oct; Nov; Dec

Origin: not native to North America

Uses: naturalizing; cut flowers; attracts butterflies; mass planting

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant



Figure 1. Butterfly-Weed.

Description

Height: 1 to 2 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: round; upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

- Leaf arrangement:** alternate
- Leaf type:** simple
- Leaf margin:** entire
- Leaf shape:** oblong
- Leaf venation:** parallel
- Leaf type and persistence:** deciduous
- Leaf blade length:** 4 to 8 inches
- Leaf color:** green
- Fall color:** not applicable
- Fall characteristic:** not applicable

Flower

- Flower color:** red; yellow
- Flower characteristic:** summer flowering; spring flowering

Fruit

- Fruit shape:** unknown
- Fruit length:** unknown
- Fruit cover:** unknown
- Fruit color:** unknown
- Fruit characteristic:** inconspicuous and not showy

Trunk and Branches

- Trunk/bark/branches:** not applicable
- Current year stem/twig color:** green
- Current year stem/twig thickness:** thick

Culture

- Light requirement:** plant grows in full sun
- Soil tolerances:** acidic; slightly alkaline; sand; loam; clay
- Drought tolerance:** high
- Soil salt tolerances:** poor
- Plant spacing:** 18 to 24 inches

Other

- Roots:** not applicable
- Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- Outstanding plant:** plant has outstanding ornamental features and could be planted more
- Invasive potential:** may self-seed each year

Pest resistance: very sensitive to one or more pests or diseases which can affect plant health or aesthetics

Use and Management

As plants age and become somewhat woody near the base of the plant, cut them back to stimulate new growth near the bottom. This will help them look good for many years.

The best sites have exposure to sun or partial shade and almost any soil. Butterfly weed is slow to start growth in the spring. Mark its location in hardiness zones 8 and parts of 9 before the plant disappears in the winter to prevent damage to easily injured dormant crowns. A deep root (taproot) reportedly makes transplanting difficult. Once established do not disturb butterfly weed unnecessarily. Occasional fertilization can help keep flowers coming nearly all year long.

Aphids may infest Butterfly Weed.

Pests and Diseases

Leaf spot diseases are seen but not serious.

Rusts cause the formation of reddish colored spots.

Cucumber mosaic virus causes leaf mottling but no chemical control is available.