



Cooperative Extension Service
Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

*Asclepias tuberosa*¹

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Introduction

Butterfly weed is a member of the milkweed family (Fig. 1). The plants grow to two feet tall and flower from July to September. The flower colors are orange, red and yellow. The plant will not flower freely until well established. The best sites have exposure to sun or partial shade and almost any soil. The plant tolerates dry soil but not heavy soil. Butterfly weed is slow to start growth in the spring. Mark its location to prevent damage to easily injured dormant crowns. A taproot makes transplanting difficult. Once established do not disturb butterfly weed unnecessarily.

General Information

Scientific name: *Asclepias tuberosa*

Pronunciation: ass-KLEE-pee-us too-bur-O-suh

Common name(s): Butterfly-Weed, Indian Paintbrush

Family: *Asclepiadaceae*

Plant type: herbaceous; annual

USDA hardiness zones: 8 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: native to Florida

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

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

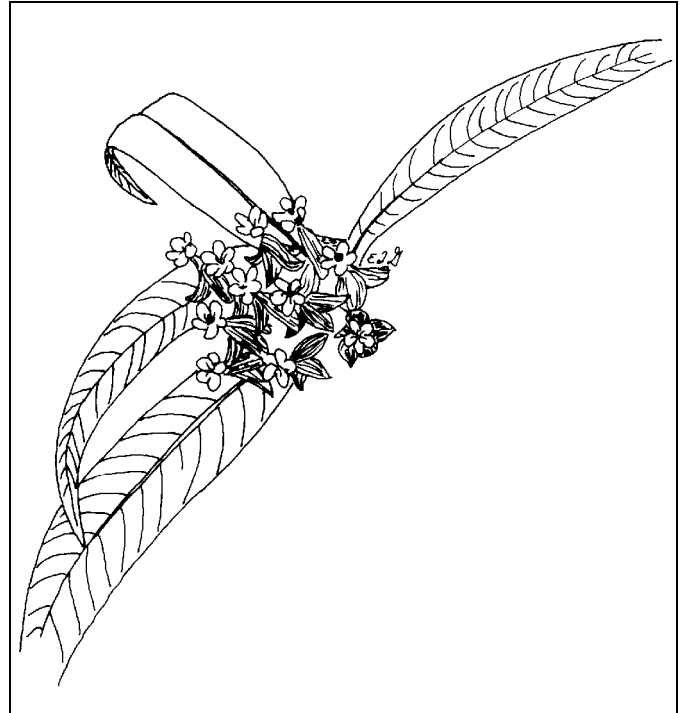


Figure 1. Butterfly-Weed.

Description

Height: 2 to 3 feet

Spread: 2 to 3 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; sand; loam; clay
- Drought tolerance:** moderate
- 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 the name implies, this is one of many small plants that attract butterflies to the landscape. One to several plants is usually all that is needed to draw butterflies to the garden. There are reports that *Asclepias* has a tendency to escape cultivation and may seed into the landscape. They grow naturally in dry sandy soil along roadsides from New England to Colorado, Texas and into Florida.

Raw roots have been eaten to treat bronchial ailments. Roots have also been taken internally for gas, hemorrhaging and other ailments.

Propagation is by seed or division in the spring. The seed germinates in 3 to 4 weeks at 70 to 75-degrees F. Plants may be planted in a cold frame in spring or fall. Fresh seed may need chilling.

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.