**Primetime**

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**“Butterflies in your Landscape”**

What a change from 2011 in terms of the number of butterflies! There are more blooms, more foliage, and as a result, more butterflies.

You can enhance the variety and numbers of butterflies you attract to your landscape by selecting the plants to supplement the plants that are already in the neighborhood.

For the shade use pentas to provide attractive red, white, pink or lavender blooms and also provide nectar for a wide variety of butterflies. Pentas are a great container plant and will bring the butterflies right up onto the patio for easy observation.

Pentas occasionally are targeted by tomato hornworms as a food source for their larvae.

Zinnias and vincas are good butterfly plants. Many species seek nectar from the flowers. Like pentas, zinnias and vincas stay in bloom the entire growing season serving as a reliable nectar source. Zinnias, especially the Dreamland selection available as transplants at most nurseries grow equally well in gardens or containers. Select the “Cora” variety of vinca to avoid problems with the fungus disease aerial phytophera.

The giant swallowtail is a beautiful butterfly and although its caterpillar can’t be considered beautiful by most measures, it certainly is interesting. The caterpillar resembles bird droppings! Citrus normally do not require a spray program for insects, so if you have a Satsuma or other citrus expect to have the giant swallowtail, use it as a nursery. The feeding damage is rarely severe but you can reduce the population on the citrus by removing most of the caterpillars by hand.

Monarchs are the most well known butterfly. If you want to support local breeding populations or the migrating adults, find the space for butterfly weeds (asclepias). There are native asclepias and exotics and all are attractive to the monarchs. In fact, monarch relies almost exclusively on plants in the milkweed family for foliage. The orange and yellow flowers are not in a league with pentas or zinnias for blooms but they are a good nectar source.

If you grow dill or parsley on the patio it is pretty certain that black swallowtails will lay their eggs on the plants. Pick off some of the caterpillars if you want to preserve a portion of the foliage. The black swallowtail is not as easygoing on parsley as the giant swallowtail is on citrus.

Passionvine is another favorite butterfly plant that serves as a nursery for caterpillars in addition to providing attractive blooms and nectar. Gulf fritillary will find your passionvine.

Some of the late wildflowers are good sources of butterfly nectar. Extend the wildflower patch season of bloom by planting cosmos.

Spread the cosmos seeds where they will reach the soil in full sun. It will require one or two rains to germinate the seed but after that moisture, they are very drought tolerant. The gold and yellow cosmos seem to be tougher and showier than the pinks, whites, and lavenders but all will work.

Another tough summer bloomer is Maximilian sunflower. Spread the seed over a piece of bare ground in full sun and within a few weeks the sturdy plants will be reaching for the sky. Even before the blooms begin their showy display, painted lady butterflies and other species will have laid their eggs on the lush foliage. Some years the caterpillars will be so thick that they will strip the plants nearly bare, but don’t worry, the sunflowers will recover.

For more information on plants that attract butterflies obtain “Butterfly Gardening for the South” by Gevata Ajilvsgi. In addition to plants, the book offers ideas on attracting butterflies with water, mud, overripe fruit, and sugar water.

In addition to adding foliage plants that provide food for caterpillars and blooming plants that are nectar sources, gardeners that want to preserve or increase the butterflies that frequent their landscapes need to be especially careful with insecticides. General applications to lawns or gardens are not recommended. The relationship between caterpillars and adult butterflies must be remembered. Some butterflies can fly into your landscape but there will be many more if you protect caterpillars.