**Weekly Express-News Article**

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**“Butterflies Butterflies Are Everywhere”**

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 number of butterflies you attract to your landscape by selecting the plants to supplement the plants that are already in the neighborhood.

Another way to encourage butterfly numbers is to wait to mow the wildflower patches as long as you can. Hopefully, you have coreopsis and verbenas still blooming with the expectation of Mexican hat and firewheels coming into bloom. Those are all favorite butterfly nectar sources. Butterflies also lay their eggs on the stems and foliage of wildflowers.

The other reason to delay the mowing is that the wildflowers must mature and drop their seed for plants next spring. Let the seedpods reach full size and brown if you expect to have enough seed for next year.

It helps to resist the pressure to mow the wildflower patch prematurely if there is a succession of flowers blooming. The late blooming wildflowers help but you can further disguise the wildflower “ugly period” by spreading cosmos seed in the area. Cosmos is very popular with butterflies and also makes a good summer show of blooms.

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 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.

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.

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! Most of us do not normally spray for insects on our citrus, 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 as severe as experienced on the passionvine or sunflower but you can reduce the population on small trees such as those in containers by picking off a portion of the caterpillars.

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. They will eat a plant down to stems very quickly if you let them persist.

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.

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.

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.

To identify the many species, obtain a butterfly handbook. There are a number of good ones. Look for one that shows photos of the caterpillars in addition to the adults.

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.