

***Asclepias curassavica* Butterflyweed, Milkweed, Silkweed¹**

Edward F. Gilman²

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)



Figure 1. Butterfly-Weed.

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

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2. Edward f. Gilman, professor, Environmental Horticulture Department, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, 32611

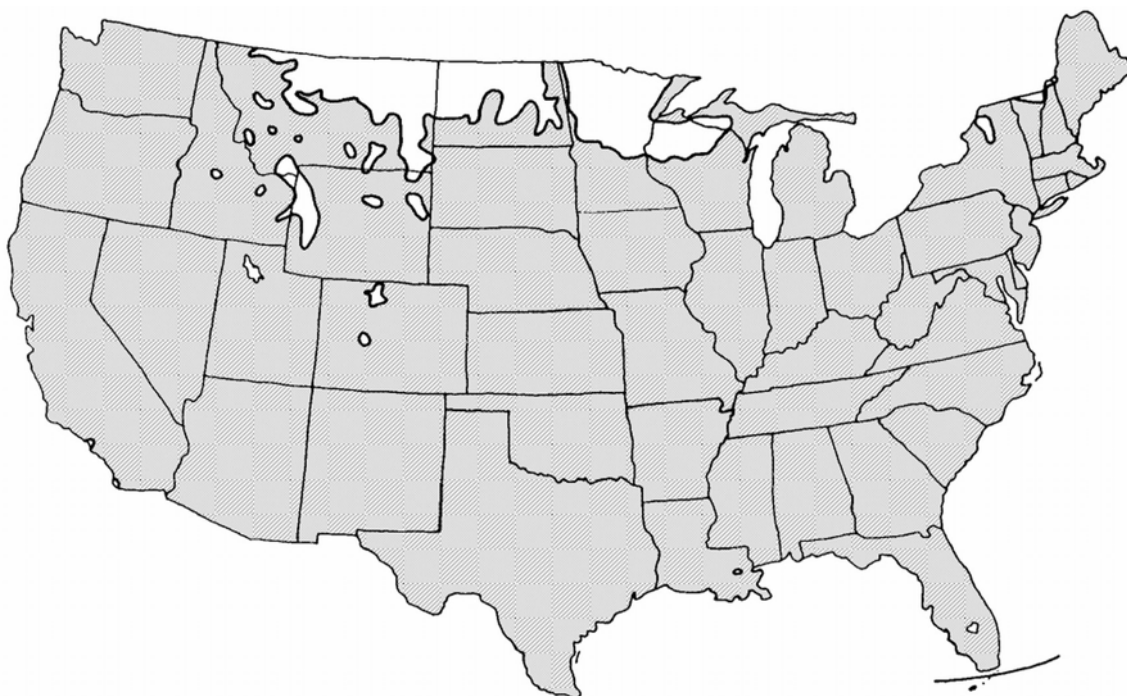


Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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

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

Description

Height: 1 to 2 feet

Spread: 1 to 2 feet

Plant habit: round; upright

Plant density: moderate

Growth rate: fast

Texture: medium

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.