

# Eco-Friendly Native Plant of the Month

JULY 2017

NC NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY

REEDY CREEK NATURE PRESERVE



*Monarch larvae*



*Black Swallowtail butterfly*

*Photos by Will Stuart and Paula Gross*

## *Asclepias tuberosa* Butterfly Weed

### **Better than a weed!**

You may know this easy to grow garden plant as Butterfly Weed, but as Larry Mellichamp says...*Asclepias tuberosa* is "a classic roadside plant... so don't let the 'weed' designation fool you." All it needs is lots of sun (can tolerate some shade) and lean, well drained soil. It can handle clay and drought, just be sure to avoid a wet area, as the long taproot will rot. Butterfly Weed makes a perfect meadow plant and has a long bloom season, often re-blooming several more times with a little water. Because Butterfly Weed is late to break dormancy each spring, it is a good idea to mark their spot so you don't dig and damage the crown. Instead plant it with early bloomers such as *Oenothera* and *Baptisia* or with other hot summer plants such as Blazing Star, Tickseeds, and grasses such as Little Bluestem or Indian Grass.

Dianas, coral hairstreaks, fritillaries, crescents, swallowtails, spicebush and monarch butterflies take nectar from the vivid flat flower clusters. A wide array of bees and wasps, and other pollinators can also be found on Butterfly Weed.

### **Downy Parachutes**

Butterfly Weed will reseed in your garden from the thousands of seeds each summer contained in those distinctively long seed capsules. It does attract annoying aphids in late

summer, but these can be easily removed with a spray of the garden hose, or soapy water. *Asclepias tuberosa* is the only one in this genus with clear sap, the rest are known for the milky sap could be mildly irritating to skin.

### **Words of Caution**

Butterfly Weed is easy to find in most nurseries. However, NCNPS encourages you to be aware that some plants have been sprayed with Neonicotinoids, a nursery chemical that may be harmful to pollinator populations. It is easy to grow your own Butterfly Weed from seed as an alternative. Another word of caution is to be sure you are not buying Tropical Milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*, which is not native to NC.

For more Eco and Bird Friendly pages visit:  
[ncwildflower.org](http://ncwildflower.org)  
[ncnpssouthern piedmont.wordpress.com](http://ncnpssouthern piedmont.wordpress.com)  
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**Important to Monarch migration**  
...The *Asclepias* genus is the sole food source for Monarch larvae (caterpillars). Adult butterflies lay eggs on *Asclepias* as they grow successive generations on their march north each summer. Find out more about the Butterfly Highway at NC Wildlife Federation or [ncwf.org](http://ncwf.org).

