**Cassia bicapsularis**
Butterfly Bush

Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson

**INTRODUCTION**

While other trees are preparing for winter, Butterfly Bush is just waking up (Fig. 1). This sprawling, semi-evergreen shrub, reaching a height of 8 to 10 feet with an equal spread, produces blossoms in fall that resemble golden butterflies. Bright yellow flowers appear at a time of year when little else is in bloom. This plant has a place in any sunny landscape.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

**Scientific name:** Cassia bicapsularis  
**Pronunciation:** KASS-ee-uh bye-kap-soo-LAIR-iss  
**Common name(s):** Butterfly Bush  
**Family:** Leguminosae  
**USDA hardiness zones:** 9 through 11 (Fig. 2)  
**Origin:** not native to North America  
**Uses:** container or above-ground planter; recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; specimen  
**Availability:** generally available in many areas within its hardiness range

![Figure 1. Mature Butterfly Bush.](image)

**DESCRIPTION**

**Height:** 8 to 12 feet  
**Spread:** 8 to 10 feet  
**Crown uniformity:** irregular outline or silhouette  
**Crown shape:** round; vase shape  
**Crown density:** open  
**Growth rate:** medium  
**Texture:** fine

**Foliage**

**Leaf arrangement:** alternate (Fig. 3)  
**Leaf type:** even pinnately compound  
**Leaflet margin:** entire  
**Leaflet shape:** obovate; ovate  
**Leaflet venation:** pinnate  
**Leaf type and persistence:** semievergreen  
**Leaflet blade length:** less than 2 inches  
**Leaf color:** green  
**Fall color:** no fall color change  
**Fall characteristic:** not showy

**Flower**

**Flower color:** yellow  
**Flower characteristics:** fall flowering; very showy

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**Figure 2.** Shaded area represents potential planting range.

**Fruit**

- **Fruit shape:** pod
- **Fruit length:** 3 to 6 inches; 1 to 3 inches
- **Fruit covering:** dry or hard
- **Fruit color:** brown
- **Fruit characteristics:** does not attract wildlife; inconspicuous and not showy; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree

**Trunk and Branches**

- **Trunk/bark/branches:** bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; no thorns
- **Pruning requirement:** requires pruning to develop strong structure
- **Breakage:** susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break
- **Current year twig color:** brown; green
- **Current year twig thickness:** medium

**Culture**

- **Light requirement:** tree grows in part shade/part sun; tree grows in full sun
- **Soil tolerances:** clay; loam; sand; slightly alkaline; acidic; well-drained
- **Drought tolerance:** moderate
- **Aerosol salt tolerance:** moderate

**Other**

- **Roots:** surface roots are usually not a problem
- **Winter interest:** no special winter interest
- **Outstanding tree:** not particularly outstanding
- **Invasive potential:** little, if any, potential at this time
- **Pest resistance:** long-term health usually not affected by pests

**USE AND MANAGEMENT**

When knocked down by frost, the stems should be cut off at ground level and vigorous sprouts will emerge in spring. Butterfly Bush benefits from frequent pinching of the young shoot tips during the growing season up to the beginning of September; this encourages branching and increases the number of
Flowers. Appropriate training can produce a very small specimen tree which looks nice growing in a low ground cover. Trees often fall over and will require staking to hold them upright. For this reason, it is easiest to place it in a shrub border among other shrubs which will help hold it erect. Well worth the effort to stake a specimen tree, if needed, since the tree is simply stunning in flower.

Tolerant of many soil conditions, Butterfly Bush needs full sun for best growth and flowering, and needs little care once established. Plant it and forget about it, except for occasional watering during drought. A good plant for highway median or roadside specimen or cluster planting.

Propagation is by seed or cuttings.

**Pests**

Foliage and flower buds are often eaten by caterpillars in the fall, but these can be easily picked off by hand. Cassia is otherwise seldom plagued by insect pests or diseases. Damaged or stressed cassia can be infested with trunk borers.

**Diseases**

No diseases are of major concern.