**Asclepias tuberosa**

Edward F. Gilman

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**Introduction**

Butterfly weed is a member of the milkweed family (Fig. 1). The plants grow to two feet tall and flower from July to September. The flower colors are orange, red and yellow. The plant will not flower freely until well established. The best sites have exposure to sun or partial shade and almost any soil. The plant tolerates dry soil but not heavy soil. Butterfly weed is slow to start growth in the spring. Mark its location to prevent damage to easily injured dormant crowns. A taproot makes transplanting difficult. Once established do not disturb butterfly weed unnecessarily.

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**General Information**

- **Scientific name:** Asclepias tuberosa
- **Pronunciation:** ass-KLEE-pee-us too-bur-O-suh
- **Common name(s):** Butterfly-Weed, Indian Paintbrush
- **Family:** Asclepiadaceae
- **Plant type:** herbaceous; annual
- **USDA hardiness zones:** 8 through 10 (Fig. 2)
- **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:** native to Florida
- **Uses:** naturalizing; cut flowers; attracts butterflies; mass planting; attracts hummingbirds
- **Availability:** somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the plant

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**Description**

- **Height:** 2 to 3 feet
- **Spread:** 2 to 3 feet
- **Plant habit:** round; upright
- **Plant density:** moderate
- **Growth rate:** fast
- **Texture:** medium

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1. This document is Fact Sheet FPS-50, one of a series of the Environmental Horticulture Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Publication date: October 1999. Please visit the EDIS web site at http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu.

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

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; sand; loam; clay
Drought tolerance: moderate
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 the name implies, this is one of many small plants that attract butterflies to the landscape. One to several plants is usually all that is needed to draw butterflies to the garden. There are reports that Asclepias has a tendency to escape cultivation and may seed into the landscape. They grow naturally in dry sandy soil along roadsides from New England to Colorado, Texas and into Florida.

Raw roots have been eaten to treat bronchial ailments. Roots have also been taken internally for gas, hemorrhaging and other ailments.

Propagation is by seed or division in the spring. The seed germinates in 3 to 4 weeks at 70 to 75-degrees F. Plants may be planted in a cold frame in spring or fall. Fresh seed may need chilling.

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.