**Introduction**

Butterfly weed is a member of the milkweed family, and by some reports, the only *Asclepias* that does consistently well in south Florida (Figure 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 (Figure 2)

**Planting month for zone 7:** Jun; Jul

**Planting month for zone 8:** May; Jun; Jul; Aug

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U.S. Department of Agriculture, UF/IFAS Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A & M University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating. Nick T. Place, dean for UF/IFAS Extension.
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

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.

**Pests and Diseases**

Aphids may infest butterfly weed.

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.