

Going Wild with Florida Native Plants



Photos by Andee Nacarrato| Host to Julia Butterfly.

By Staff

If you ask any gardener, there is a special feeling that comes from watching a Monarch Butterfly with its vibrant color flutter by and land on a milkweed plant. Everybody knows that the milkweed is the only plant on which the adult Monarch Butterfly and its caterpillars feed on. Without milkweeds, they cannot complete their life cycle.

According to Andee Nacarrato, President of the Naples Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society (FNPS), more and more residents are using Florida native plants for their landscapes.

They are using plants that are native to our local ecosystem (Collier County), too.

Native plants have lived in Florida almost “forever” said Nacarrato, and they are adapted to our local rainfall patterns and soils, which means that they require less supplemental irrigation or fertilizer once established. Also, certain insects can only eat plants that they have co-evolved with, such as the Monarch Butterfly, and over thousands of years these insects have specialized in certain plants. They have no evolutionary experience with plants from Asia or Africa. They won’t eat them or even recognize them as food plants.

Nacarrato added that “if all native plants disappeared from Collier County, this place we call Paradise would no longer be an enjoyable place to live or visit. Luckily for us, 70 percent of Collier County is composed of conservation lands from Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary to Big Cypress National Preserve. Native plants provide the foundation for the lives of



Photos by Connie Nagele, FNPS| Native Bahama senna – pollinators are attracted to the bright yellow flowers that bloom all year.

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all the wildlife that share our home from zebra longwing butterflies to the Florida panthers."

As gardeners, we've all had a hand in the drastic reduction of birds and insects that visit our yards. If you take a survey of plants in your landscape, most likely the majority came from other countries or regions and are unlikely to attract a diverse collection of insects and birds local to our region in your backyard. A landscape with native plants is not just a beautiful place but a place that produces food and offer shelter for wildlife. If you combine plants that provide both, you will be creating a beautiful dynamic habitat attracting many types of local pollinators and wildlife.





The way you create your garden is a big indicator on what wildlife will look like tomorrow – so go big with native plants! Some suggestions below to enhance your plant diversity:

Milkweed (Butterfly weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*) – both host and nectar to monarch butterflies, a critical addition to your native plant collection.

Snow squarestem (*Melanthera nivea* – aka Salt and Pepper) – According to Connie Nagele of the FNPS of Naples, this is candy for butterflies and other pollinators. Perfect for coastal habitat. (nectar)

Coreopsis (Leavenworthii tickseed) is the official Florida Wildflower. According to Karynn Allman of FNPS of Naples, this is a plant you don't want to pass up. This attracts the

Southern broken dash skipper and is a good source of nectar and pollen. (nectar)

Bahama senna (*Senna mexicana* var. *chapmanii*) – Pollinators are attracted to the bright yellow flowers that bloom all year. A small evergreen shrub (two to four feet) perfect for small yards. Host plant for the Cloudless Sulphur, Sleepy Orange, and Orange-barred Sulphur. (host)



Photos by Donna Kay| Monarch caterpillar – feeds only on the butterfly milkweed leaves.

By Staff

Turkey Tangle Fogfruit (*Phyla nodiflora*) is a native plant for butterflies that most residents already have growing in their yards but don't know what it is. It is a groundcover with tiny matchstick like flower heads. It is the host plant for two different butterflies – the White Peacock and Phaon Crescent. (host)

Corkystem Passionflower (*Passifloraceae*) is a butterfly host plant that is easily overlooked. According to Nacarrato, the flowers of this passion vine are light green and the size of a penny. Stems look and feel a bit like cork. This is Collier County's most common native passionflower vine. Host to

three native butterflies – Gulf fritillary, Julia, and Zebra Longwing.

Native plants can look a bit untamed and messy, but they are natural and can be controlled with occasional pruning! Overall, planting native is good stewardship for our local ecosystem.





Resources:

Florida Native Plant Society: www.fnps.org.

Naples Chapter of Florida Naples Plant Society:
fnpsnaples.org.

Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation: www.scff.org.

Here is a list of native plant Nurseries in the area, provided
by FNPS of Naples:

Cutting Horse Eco Center in Bonita Springs –
www.fnps.org/natives/garden/cutting-horse

Good Roots Nursery in Estero – www.goodrootsnursery.com

Natives of Corkscrew in Estero – www.corkscrewnatives.com

SCCF Native Landscapes & Garden Center in Sanibel –
www.sccf.org

All Natives in Ft. Myers – www.nolawn.com

