

MOBILE Botanical Gardens



Tiger Swallowtail on Lantana



Black Swallowtail



Gulf Fritillary



Cloudless Sulphur



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- **A sunny place to bask to warm** their bodies: Butterflies are cold-blooded and bask in the sun to raise their body temperatures. A sunny, flowering garden with a flat stone for basking tucked among the blooms will help attract butterflies.

- **Some shade for when they rest:** Shrubs, small trees and vine-covered trellises provide protection from wind and rain as well as a resting place.

- **A fence or tree for a windbreak:** Butterflies dislike strong winds, so it helps to include ornamental grasses and tall plants to provide windbreaks.

- **Damp soil or sand for a water source:** Butterflies drink by sucking water from moist ground. Sink a saucer in the ground, fill with sand and soak. Then put a flat pebble at the edge for a perch.

- **Nectar plants for food:** Butterflies are attracted to the simpler, brighter flowers. Size, shape, fragrance and visual markings on flowers help butterflies locate nectar. Butterflies more easily spot masses of color, so place flowering plants in groups if possible.

- **Food plants for the caterpillars:** Encourage female butterflies to lay eggs in the garden by planting larval food plants. The caterpillars that hatch will seek a safe place to form a cocoon. Several days later, a new butterfly will emerge. The larvae, or caterpillars, will eat tender foliage on these food plants, but leaves

Hosts with the Most

Recommended Caterpillar Food Plants for Central South Gardens

Written by Paulette Haywood Ogard

Co-Author of *Butterflies of Alabama: Glimpses into Their Lives*

Passionflower or Maypop

(*Passiflora incarnata*)

Host for Gulf Fritillary and Variegated Fritillary

Passionflower is a native perennial vine commonly found along fencerows, in old fields, and disturbed sites. Its frilly lavender flowers bring a tropical look to the garden throughout the summer even though each blossom lasts only one day. The fruits are hollow yellow-green globes—step on one and you will hear the distinctive “pop” that gives the plant one of its common names. They are edible as well as decorative, and many farmhouse pantries contain jars of maypop jelly.

Cultivation Tips: Passionflower vines die back to their roots every winter but quickly re-grow in early summer. Provide a fence or trellis for support or let them run along the ground. The vines frequently produce suckers, which may be potted up and shared with friends. In small gardens, simply pulling them up from unwanted spots can control the shoots. Grow Passionflower in full sun or slight shade. It will accept dry to moist conditions but does not appreciate wet feet.

Pipevine or Dutchman’s Pipe

(*Aristolochia tomentosa*)

Host for Pipevine Swallowtail

Pipevine is a native perennial vine with large heart-shaped leaves and distinctive pipe-shaped flowers. The curious blossoms dangle from short stems in early summer. Be sure to be on the lookout for them since they are small and often hidden in the foliage. Foliage is dense, and in the last century, it was often planted to shade a sunny porch. The plant is deciduous, losing all its leaves with the first hard freeze. The woody structure remains, and velvety new leaves bud out in spring.

Cultivation Tips: Plant in full sun or partial shade. In the garden, an arbor or trellis can provide support. Soil should be moist but not soggy. Once established, Pipevine will produce runners that may be pulled or potted. Other than pruning its suckers, Pipevine is virtually maintenance free.

Milkweeds

(*Asclepias* species)

Host for Monarch

Three milkweeds are commonly available in nurseries. All will function as host plants for Monarch butterflies, but each has its own niche in the landscape. Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a native perennial with bright orange flowers that are nectar magnets for many butterflies, including the hairstreaks. Commonly seen growing on dry, sunny roadsides, it dies to the ground each winter and is one of the last plants to send up new growth when warm weather returns. Swamp Milkweed (*A. incarnata*) is subtler in color, producing dusty pink blossoms that are

also nectar rich. In its natural habitat, it is often found growing along wetland edges. Tropical or Scarlet Milkweed (*A. curassavica*) is often sold in nurseries, but is not native and has become an invasive problem in some parts of the Coastal Plain. It is an annual but readily self-sows, adding to its potential as a pest.

Cultivation Tips: Grow Butterfly Milkweed in full sun. A long taproot makes transplanting difficult, so plant it where you want it. Once established, it is drought tolerant. Swamp Milkweed also grows in full sun but will accept some shade. True to its wetland origins, it needs even moisture for best growth. Deadheading milkweeds after the first flowers have faded but before they set seed will encourage a second set of blossoms. A number of creatures other than Monarch caterpillars have adapted to milkweeds’ toxicity and a whole array of prey/predators can often be found on the plants (including aphids and various milkweed beetles and bugs).

Carrot Family

(*Apiaceae*)

Host for Black Swallowtail

Any member of the carrot family—Parsley, Dill, Fennel, Caraway, Queen Anne’s Lace (Wild Carrot), and cultivated carrots will attract Black Swallowtails to the garden. Golden Alexanders, Hairy Angelica, and Mock Bishops-weed are some native representatives of the family.

Cultivation Tips: Caterpillars are big eaters. If you like to cook with these herbs, try to plant enough for everybody!