

# Butterfly Weed *Asclepias tuberosa*

**Plant Type:** Native Perennial Wildflower

**Sun Exposure:** Sun, Part Sun

**Season of Interest:** Summer, Fall

**Bloom Time:** Summer

**Bloom Color:** Bright Orange

**Height:** 12 to 24 in.

**Spread:** 12 to 16 in.

**Spacing:** 16 in.

**Water Needs:** Average

**Maintenance:** Very Little

**Soil Type:** Clay, Loam, Sandy, Rocky

**Soil pH:** Acidic, Neutral

**Soil Drainage:** Well Drained

**Pests:** Aphids

**Diseases:** Leaf spot

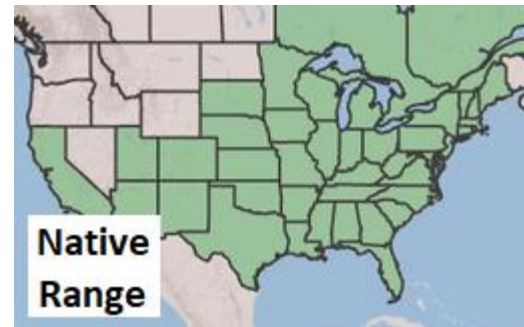
**Wildlife:** Bees, Butterflies



**Description:** Beloved for its ability to attract a variety of helpful (and beautiful) insects to the garden, butterfly weed is an easy-to-nurture herbaceous perennial. This clump-forming perennial grows from tuberous roots to a height of 1 to 2 feet and is characterized by glossy-green, lance-shaped leaves and clusters of bright orange blooms that are rich with nectar and pollen.

Butterfly weed is fairly slow to become established. It does not bloom the first year from seed; in fact, it may take as long as three years before it flowers.

Monarch butterfly caterpillars feed exclusively on the leaves of milkweed, the only host plant for this iconic species. As such, milkweed is critical for the survival of monarchs. Without it, they cannot complete their life cycle and their populations decline. Eradication of milkweed both in agricultural areas as well as in urban and suburban landscapes is one of the primary reasons that monarchs are in decline today. For more information see: [plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/asclepias-tuberosa](http://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/asclepias-tuberosa) .



**Care and Growing Tips:** If possible, choose a spot in your garden with lots of bright sunlight daily, full sun is best for flowering. Butterfly weed can prosper in a variety of soil conditions and compositions, from sand to gravel, and it generally prefers a neutral to slightly acidic pH. Once the plant appears to be well-established, it prefers dry soil. An extensive, deep taproot helps it thrive even in dry conditions. Mature plants can do well with just monthly watering in all but the driest climates.

Butterfly weed thrives in a variety of different temperature and humidity settings, growing well in zones 3 to 9. Generally, the plant emerges in late spring, hitting its peak bloom during the warmer summer months and drying on the stem throughout the autumn and winter. It handles high humidity and arid climates equally well, provided it gets adequate soil moisture. It is a low-maintenance plant that does not require any additional fertilization. In fact, doing so can harm the plant, making it excessively leggy and reducing blooms.