

# TOM'S GARDEN

## BLOG JULY 2022

### Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

If you want a bright orange flower that blooms for a long time, doesn't get too big, and is care-free, then butterfly weed is for you. As an added bonus, it brings in pollinators and helps monarch butterflies. What is not to like about that?



Butterfly weed is a perennial native to North America. It produces bright orange flowers for about 2 months from mid-June to August. Bees are the main pollinator for this flower as well as several butterfly species. It is also a host plant for monarch larva.

If you are growing butterfly weed from seed, expect blooms in its second year and grow to full size in year 3 or 4. In mature plants, by late summer or early fall seed pods will form. The seed pods will ripen, open, and disperse their seed and die back to the ground.

Bumble bees and other native bees love this plant.

Monarch butterflies will lay eggs on

butterfly weed plants. The best way to help the monarch butterfly recover is to plant host plants for them.



Butterfly weed, and milkweed are the most reliable plants to use. These plants need little to no care once they are established. They have been growing here for centuries and can thrive without any fertilizer or special needs.

Native plants have evolved with natural disease and pest resistance and have natural defenses that non-native plants don't have.

You can collect a pod of seeds in the fall and grow hundreds of plants if you want to. I suggest buying an established plant from a nursery to start off with and speed things up.

### Striped Cucumber Beetle

(*Acalymma vittatum*)

**Hosts:** A wide variety of vegetables and flowers, although cucumber, melon, squash, and other cucurbits are the favorites and most severely damaged.

**Damage:** Adult beetles feed on seedlings and can retard development or even kill young plants. Later they may be found in large numbers in flowers of squash or melon and chew pits in the fruit.



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Larvae feed on the roots, causing little damage. Adult beetles can transmit a bacterium that produces bacterial wilt in cucurbits. Striped cucumber beetle can also spread cucumber mosaic virus.

Adult beetles are about 1/5 inch long and bright yellow with three even, dark black stripes.

**Life history and Habits:** Adult beetles spend winter under debris in gardens and fields. As temperatures warm in spring, they become active and feed on leaves and flowers (pollen) of trees and shrubs. When squash-family host plants emerge, the beetles move to these plants and chew seedlings. Eggs are laid in cracks around the base of the plants, and the hatching larvae feed on the roots for about a month. They then pupate in the soil, later emerging as adult beetles. There are usually two generations per season, depending on conditions and weather.

**Control:** Try delaying your cucumber plantings by a few weeks. When the beetles emerge and don't find food, they will go elsewhere. So, by delaying your plantings, cucumber beetles that have over-wintered should leave before your plants are up.

They may be affected by the second round of beetles, but the plants will be larger and more established.

Diatomaceous earth: Sprinkle it around the base of the plant. You could also use BT (bacillus thuringiensis) to kill the larvae around the base.

Place yellow sticky traps near your plant to catch the beetles before flowers open.

Choose plants that are resistant to bacterial wilt.

There are, of course, insecticides you can use that are not bee friendly.

## Pruning Butterfly Bush (buddleja)

I like to prune my butterfly bushes twice each season.

I prune heavily in the spring, usually down to about 12 to 18 inches.

Then in Early July I prune about 6 to 8 inches off.

This gives you more blooms and delays blooming a bit, so you are ready for monarch season.

Keep in mind That buddleja is a nectar plant not only for monarchs, but for many other species and is not a host plant for the caterpillars. Plant other varieties of host plants nearby.



If you notice, I get two (or more) blooms each place I have pruned, and it keeps the plant much neater and tidy.

## Lamb's Ears (Stachys byzantia)

When you are looking for a silver accent in the garden, look for lamb's ears. The soft cuddly leaves remind us of the ear of a lamb. It was also known as bunny's ears and donkey's ears many years ago.



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The larger leaf varieties were also grown around and near outhouses for their soft and soothing use.

Plants can be grown in full sun and do best in dry climates. Too much rain will result in poor looking plants by August. Look for varieties that will adapt to less-than-ideal conditions.

### Some basic info for vining plants.

Vining plants, if left to sprawl, will take up valuable space in the garden, so help them grow up.

\*Cucumbers will eagerly climb a nylon net fence and the fruit will grow straight with less problems than touching the soil. They will also be easier to see and pick at the right stage of development.

\*Peas and pole beans will cover a wire fence or twine around a pole.

\*Some heavier plants like cantaloupes, melons, and winter squash need help to climb. Tie their vines to the structure to get them started off in the right direction. You can support the fruit with netting pouches or panty hose.

\*Tomatoes produce more fruit and ripen earlier if you keep them off the ground. Use cages or tie them to a stake to keep them upright. Slugs love tomatoes if left on the ground.

## Japanese Beetles

The Japanese beetle is generally found east of the Mississippi river. The original population was found in New Jersey in 1916, having been introduced from Japan. The highest concentration centers around golf courses and high-quality turf lawns. These beetles seem to like to feed on just about any ornamental plant.

The Japanese beetle is one of the few beetles that are highly damaging in both the adult and larval stages. Adults feed on foliage and flower petals, skeletonizing the leaves. The larvae grub feeds on grass roots and is the most damaging pest of turfgrass in the northeast U.S.

Winter is spent in soil as a nearly full-grown grub that moves deeper into the soil for winter. As the soil warms in spring, the grubs feed on grass roots, pupate, and emerge in late June and early summer, feed on foliage and mate, returning to the lawn. For more information, go to; [Ohioline.osu.edu](http://Ohioline.osu.edu) for a fact sheet.

