

Butterfly Gardening

*with Native Plants
of the
Lower Rio Grande Valley,
Texas*



**Landscape Uses
and Identification**

by the Native Plant Project

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INTRODUCTION

The Butterfly Plant Guide

An estimated 1,200 native flowering plant species grow in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. **The Native Plant Project** has selected a variety of the native plants attractive to butterflies to be featured in this handbook. If plants were included in our other handbooks, we have just noted which handbook and the page number. This was done to accommodate as many new plants as possible in this handbook. All our handbooks can be read at our website www.nativeplantproject.org.

Plants native to the Lower Rio Grande Valley have advantages over plants brought in from elsewhere. Plants from this region have the genetic factors which ensure greater probability of survival. They are preadapted, having evolved to tolerate local climatic extremes, local soils, and local diseases and pests. Native plants have evolved with temperature and rainfall extremes and will require less water than exotic plants.

Using native plants in the landscape helps conserve rarer species which are vanishing due to habitat clearing. Within the four county (Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy) Lower Rio Grande Valley area over 95% of the natural habitat has been converted or cleared for urban, agricultural, or industrial use. Establishing rare species in landscapes spreads out the individuals so a single catastrophic event cannot eradicate an entire species, and it provides a reserve seed source in the event the last individuals of a species are lost from the natural habitat.

A few of our native butterfly plants are available in Lower Rio Grande Valley nurseries. Rarer ones can be found only at those specializing in Lower Rio Grande Valley natives. (See list inserted in handbook.) More and different native plants will become available if the public demands them.

The Native Plant Project (NPP)

Founded in 1982, the **Native Plant Project's** purpose is to protect and conserve native plants and their endangered habitats in the Lower Rio Grande Valley and to promote the use of local native plants in local landscapes. One method the **NPP** uses to fulfill its mission is to disseminate information about native plants and their habitats. **NPP's** definition of a native plant is one indigenous to the four-county area of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

The **Native Plant Project** encourages the protection of native plants through conserving and restoring native habitats in refuges, natural areas in parks and wildlife management areas, and private sanctuaries. It works to protect both natural habitat and human-influenced environments. It encourages the conservation of native species through their inclusion in local landscaping. The **Native Plant Project** works cooperatively with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Natural Heritage Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and many private organizations toward protecting Endangered Species, including those local natives imperiled but yet unlisted.

BUTTERFLY GARDENING

To attract butterflies to your garden, two types of plants are needed – nectar plants and host plants. Plants that produce flowers with a high nectar content provide food for most adult butterflies. Use a variety of plants to insure that some flowers will be blooming throughout the year. Adult female butterflies lay their eggs on host plants that will be eaten by the caterpillars. Some plants are both nectar and host plants. Some butterfly species use a variety of host plants while other butterfly species use only a single plant species. For example, the Gray Hairstreak lays its eggs on chapote, desert lantana, guayacan, and other plants. The Xami Hairstreak lays its eggs only on sedum in our area.

You can design your butterfly garden to suit the site you have selected. Most butterflies prefer lots of sunshine so your site should have an area of full or almost full sun. Most nectar and host plants also need at least part sun. Consider how much sun will be present in the winter as well as in the summer. Certain butterflies, such as the Malachite, Mexican Bluewing and Zebra Longwing, are found in the dappled shade of woodlands. Having a butterfly garden near trees increases your chance of attracting these woodland butterflies, and provides a refuge for sun loving butterflies during mid-afternoon heat.

Consider the mature height and spread of each plant when designing the garden. Allow sufficient space so that plants do not overlap or crowd each other when they mature. Usually shorter plants are placed closer to walkways and taller ones further away. If there is sufficient morning and mid-day sun in your garden, taller shrubs and trees may be planted on the west side to block the hot late afternoon sun.

While most LRGV native plants require less water than exotics, the native butterfly garden will require regular watering to keep the plants attractive and nectar flowing. Drip irrigation or soaker hoses allow water to go directly into the soil thereby conserving water and saving you time. A four to six inch layer of mulch also conserves water, keeps the soil cooler, and provides nutrients to the plants as the mulch decomposes.

Glyphosate herbicide can be used to kill Bermuda grass before planting your native garden. Of course, insecticides should not be used in the butterfly garden as they will not only kill pest insects but butterflies as well. If applying fertilizer, make sure that it does not contain an insecticide as some fertilizers for ornamental plants do.

Besides growing native host and nectar plants, you can make your garden better butterfly habitat by setting out rotting fruit in a shady spot (eaten by some adults such as the hackberry butterflies and leafwings), making a shallow water feature or moist seep for adults to obtain water and minerals, and by including a few plants with dense foliage to provide protection from wind and rain. A woodpile or rock wall offers winter protection.

When pruning the plants, examine the cut branches carefully for chrysalises or stack the branches nearby for a few months to allow time for the adults to emerge before discarding the branches.

Carlowrightia, Small Flowered Wrightwort

Carlowrightia parviflora

Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

Height:	To 2½ ft
Soil:	Any
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low
Nectar plant:	Fair
Host to:	Crimson Patch



Crimson Patch
on Crucita

Dicliptera, Six Angle Fold Wing

Dicliptera sexangularis = *D. vabliana*

Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

Height:	2 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade
Water:	Low
	Will reseed to different locations; aggressive
Host to:	Texan Crescent Pale-banded Crescent Crimson Patch



Texan Crescent
on Betony
Leaf Mistflower

Runyon's Water Willow

Justicia runyonii

Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

Height:	2-2 1/2 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun, blooms more in sun
Water:	Medium
Nectar plant:	Good
Host to:	Malachite



Malachite

Ruellia, Wild Petunia

Ruellia nudiflora

Acanthaceae, Acanthus family

Height:	1-2 ft
Soil:	Various, well drained
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low, but blooms more with watering
Nectar plant:	Fair
Host to:	Pale-banded Crescent Malachite Texan Crescent White Peacock



Pale-banded
Crescent

Prairie Milkweed, Hierba de Zizotes

Asclepias oenotheroides

Asclepiadaceae, Milkweed family

Height:	1-1½ ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Full sun
Water:	Medium
Host to:	Monarch Queen



Queen caterpillar on
Prairie Milkweed



Queen on Crucita

Swanflower

Aristolochia erecta

Aristolochiaceae, Dutchman's pipe family

Height:	Short vine, 10-12 in
Soil:	Sandy
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low
Host to:	Pipeline Swallowtail



Pipeline Swallowtail on
Mexican Wild Olive

Lazy Daisy, *Aphanostephus* species

Asteraceae, Aster Family

Annual that re-seeds

Height: To 18 in

Soil: Various

Sun: Full sun

Water: Low

Nectar plant: Good



Reakirt's Blue on Lazy Daisy

Crucita

Chromolaena odorata = *Eupatorium odoratum*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Height: 3-6 ft

Soil: Various

Sun: Partial shade to full sun

Water: Low

Nectar plant: Excellent; mostly fall blooming

Host to: Rounded Metalmark

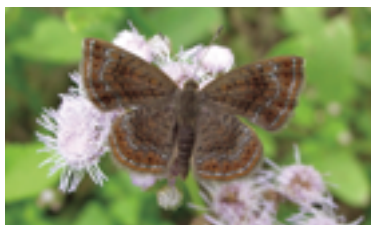


Betony Leaf Mistflower

Conoclinium betonicifolium = *Eupatorium betonicifolium*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Height:	1-2 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Medium
Nectar plant:	Very good
Host to:	Rounded Metalmark



Rounded Metalmark on Betony Leaf Mistflower

Tiny Tim *Dyssodia tenuiloba* = *Thymophylla tenuiloba* and **Five Needle Dogweed**

Dyssodia pentachaeta = *Thymophylla pentachaeta*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Height:	4 inches - 1 ft
Soil:	Various, well drained
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low
Nectar plant:	Fair
Host to:	Dainty Sulphur



Dainty Sulphur

White Mistflower, Trailing Mistflower

Fleishmannia incarnata = *Eupatorium incarnatum*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Height:	Climbs to 3-6 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Medium
Nectar plant:	Very good



Bush Sunflower *Simsia calva*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Height:	To 3 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low to medium
Nectar plant:	Very good



Pale-rayed Skipper on Bush Sunflower

Seaside Goldenrod *Solidago sempervirens*

Asteraceae, Aster family

See Pond Handbook, page 15

Nectar plant: Excellent; blooms summer-fall

Spring Mistflower, Blue Boneset

Tamulipa azurea

Asteraceae, Aster Family

Height:	To 7 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Medium
Nectar plant:	Fair; mostly spring blooming



Cowpen Daisy *Verbesina encelioides*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Annual that re-seeds

Height:	3 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Full sun
Water:	Low
Nectar plant:	Very good
Host to:	Bordered Patch

Bordered Patch caterpillars on Cowpen Daisy



Frostweed *Verbesina microptera*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Height:	3-6 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Medium
Nectar plant:	Very good
Host to:	Bordered Patch



Phaon Crescent on Frostweed

Goldeneye Daisy, Skeletonbush

Viguiera stenoloba

Asteraceae, Aster family

See Shrub Handbook, page 9

Nectar plant: Good

Wedelia, Hairy Wedelia, Zexmenia

Wedelia texana = *W. hispida*

Asteraceae, Aster family

Height:	To 3 ft	
Soil:	Various	
Sun:	Full sun	
Water:	Low	
Nectar plant:	Very good	
Host to:	Bordered Patch	Bordered Patch



Mexican Wild Olive, Anacahuita

Cordia boissieri

Boraginaceae, Borage family

See Tree Handbook, page 33

Nectar plant: Very good

Taperleaf Heliotrope, Scorpion's Tail

Heliotropium angiospermum

Boraginaceae, Borage family

Height: 1-2 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Low to medium
Nectar plant: Very good



Butterfly Bush, Tepozan

Buddleja sessiliflora

Buddlejaceae, Butterfly-bush family

Height: To 6 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Partial shade to full sun
Water: Medium
Nectar plant: Good



Sedum, Texas Stonecrop

Lenophyllum texanum = *Sedum texanum*

Crassulaceae, Stonecrop family

Height:	Low ground cover
Soil:	Clay
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low
Host to:	Xami Hairstreak



Xami Hairstreak

Chapote, Texas Persimmon

Diospyros texana

Ebenaceae, Ebony family

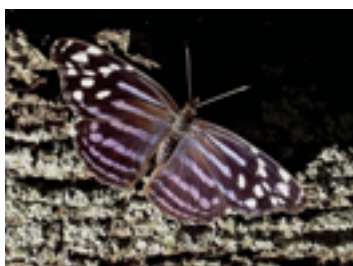
See Tree Handbook, page 31

Nectar plant:	Fair
Host to:	Gray Hairstreak

Vasey Adelia *Adelia vaseyi*

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family

Height:	3-10 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low
Host to:	Mexican Bluewing



Mexican Bluewing

Bernardia, Oreja de Raton

Bernardia myricifolia

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge Family

Height:	3-8 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low to medium
Host to:	Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreak



Lacey's Scrub-Hairstreak
on Goldeneye Daisy

Cortes Croton, Palillo *Croton cortesianus*

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family

Height:	3-6 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Medium
Nectar plant:	Very good
Possible Host to:	Leafwings



American Snout and Reakirt's Blue on Cortes Croton

Low Croton *Croton bumilis*

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family

See Shrub Handbook, page 13

Nectar plant:	Very good
Host to:	Tropical Leafwing



Blue Metalmark on Low Croton



Tropical Leafwing

Torrey's Croton *Croton incanus*

Euphorbiaceae, Spurge family

See Shrub Handbook, page 14

Nectar plant: Good

Host to: Leafwings



Tropical Leafwing caterpillar on Torrey's Croton

Partridge Pea

Chamaecrista fasciculata = *Cassia fasciculata*

Fabaceae, Legume family

Annual that re-seeds

Height: To 3 ft

Soil: Sandy

Sun: Full sun

Water: Low

Host to: Cloudless Sulphur
Little Yellow

Little Yellow on
Betony Leaf Mistflower



Cloudless Sulphur
on Crucita

Texas Kidneywood, Vara Dulce

Eysenhardtia texana

Fabaceae, Legume family

See Shrub Handbook, page 16

Nectar plant: Good

Host to: Southern Dogface



Southern Dogface on Crucita

Tenaza

Havardia pallens = *Pithecellobium pallens*

Fabaceae, Legume Family

See Tree Handbook, page 16

Nectar plant: Good

Scarlet Pea *Indigofera miniata*

Fabaceae, Legume family

Height: Prostrate vine

Soil: Sandy

Sun: Sun

Water: Low

Host to: Cassius Blue
Reakirt's Blue
Funereal Duskywing



Funereal Duskywing
on Crucita

Honey Mesquite *Prosopis glandulosa*

Fabaceae, Legume Family

See Tree Handbook, page 21

Host to: Reakirt's Blue



Reakirt's Blue on Michele's Lantana

Least Snoutbean *Rhynchosia minima*

Fabaceae, Legume family

Height: Twining vine

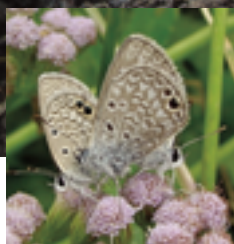
Soil: Sandy, clay

Sun: Partial shade to full sun

Water: Low, aggressive with water

Host to: Ceraunus Blue

White-striped Longtail



Ceraunus Blues on Crucita

White-striped Longtail on Texas Lantana



Scarlet Sage, Tropical Sage

Salvia coccinea

Lamiaceae, Mint family

Height:	2-3 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Medium
	Will reseed to different locations
Nectar plant:	Very good



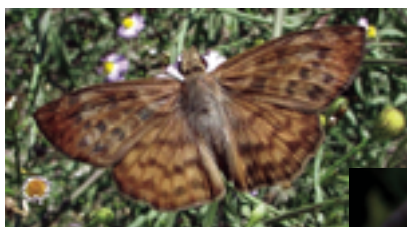
Barbados Cherry, Manzanita

Malpighia glabra

Malpighiaceae, Malpighia family

See Shrub Handbook, page 22

Host to:
Brown-banded Skipper
Cassius Blue
White-patched Skipper



Brown-banded Skipper
on *Symphotrichum divaricatum*

Cassius Blue on
Least Snoutbean



White-patched Skipper on
Betony Leaf Mistflower

Lozano's False Indian Mallow

Allowissadula lozanii

Malvaceae, Mallow Family

Height:	To 5 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Full
Water:	Low
Nectar plant:	Good
Host to:	Texas Powdered Skipper Laviana White-Skipper



Tawny Emperor on Lozano's False Indian Mallow

Heartleaf Hibiscus, Tulipan del Monte

Hibiscus martianus

Malvaceae, Mallow family

See Shrub Handbook, page 22

Nectar plant:	Very good
Host to:	Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak



Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak

Drummond's Turk's Cap, Manzanilla

Malvaviscus drummondii

Malvaceae, Mallow family

See Shrub Handbook, page 24

Nectar plant: Very good

Host to: Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak
Turk's-cap White-Skipper



Turk's-cap White-Skippers

Mallows

Abutilon, Sida, and other genera

Malvaceae, Mallow family

Height: Various

Soil: Various

Sun: Full sun

Water: Low

Host to: Mallow Scrub-Hairstreak
White Checkered-Skipper
Tropical Checkered-Skipper
Desert Checkered-Skipper
Laviana White-Skipper



Tropical
Checkered-Skipper
on
Betony Leaf
Mistflower



Laviana
White-Skipper

Blue Passion Flower, Corona de Cristo

Passiflora foetida

Passifloraceae, Passion flower family

See Cacti, Ground Covers and Vines Handbook, page 32

Host to: Gulf Fritillary



Gulf Fritillary on Crucita

Corky Stemmed Passion Flower

Passiflora suberosa

Passifloraceae, Passion flower family

Height:	Climbing vine
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to shade
Water:	Medium
Host to:	Gulf Fritillary Julia Heliconian Zebra Heliconian Mexican Silverspot



Zebra Heliconian on Texas Lantana

Slender Lobe Passion Flower

Passiflora tenuiloba

Passifloraceae, Passion flower family

Height:	Climbing vine
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade
Water:	Low to medium
Host to:	Gulf Fritillary Julia Heliconian Zebra Heliconian



Julia Heliconian
on Mexican Taxis



White Plumbago, Leadwort

Plumbago scandens

Plumbaginaceae, Plumbago family

Height:	To 3 1/2 ft, sprawling
Soil:	Any
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Moderate
Nectar plant:	Very good
Host to:	Marine Blue Cassius Blue



Marine Blue on
Betony Leaf
Mistflower

Coyotillo *Karwinskia humboldtiana*

Rhamnaceae, Buckthorn family

Height:	6 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low
Nectar plant:	Very good
Host to:	Two-barred Flasher

Two-barred Flasher
on Crucita



Dusky-blue Groundstreaks on Coyotillo

Mexican Buttonbush

Cephalanthus salicifolius

Rubiaceae, Madder Family

See Pond Handbook, page 32

Nectar plant: Excellent



Gulf Fritillary and Olive-clouded Skipper on Mexican Buttonbush

Chapotillo, Texas Torchwood

Amyris texana

Rutaceae, Citrus family

See Shrub Handbook, page 27

Host to: Giant Swallowtail

Barreta *Helietta parvifolia*

Rutaceae, Citrus family

Height: 6-12 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Full sun
Water: Low to Medium
Host to: Giant Swallowtail
Ruby Spotted Swallowtail



Giant Swallowtail caterpillar on Barreta

Dutchman's Breeches *Thamnosma texana*

Rutaceae, Citrus family

Height: 1 ft
Soil: Various
Sun: Full sun
Water: Low
Host to: Black Swallowtail



Black Swallowtail on Texas Thistle

Colima, Lime Prickly-ash

Zantboxylum fagara

Rutaceae, Citrus family

See Tree Handbook, page 27

Host to: Sickle-winged Skipper
Giant Swallowtail



Sickle-Winged Skipper on Crucita

Balloon Vine *Cardiospermum halicacabum*

Sapindaceae, Soapberry family

See Cacti, Ground Covers and Vine Handbook, page 33

Nectar plant: Good
Host to: Silver-banded Hairstreak



Silver-banded Hairstreak on Crucita

Coma Del Sur, Saffron-plum

Sideroxylon celastrinum = *Bumelia celastrina*

Sapotaceae, Sapodilla family

See Tree Handbook, page 30

Nectar plant: Good

Cenizo, Purple Sage

Leucophyllum frutescens

Scrophulariaceae, Figwort family

See Shrub Handbook, page 28

Nectar plant: Fair

Host to: Theona Checkerspot



Theona Checkerspot caterpillars on Cenizo



Theona Checkerspot on Crucita

Snapdragonvine

Maurandya antirrhiniflora

Scrophulariaceae, Figwort Family

Height: 3 ft or more

Soil: Various

Sun: Partial shade to full sun

Water: Low

Nectar plant: Fair

Host to: Common Buckeye



Woolly Pyramidbush

Melochia tomentosa

Sterculiaceae, Chocolate Family

Height:	To 7 ft
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low
Nectar plant:	Good



Eufala Skipper on Woolly Pyramidbush

White brush *Aloysia gratissima*

Verbenaceae, Verbena Family

See Shrub Handbook, page 30

Nectar plant: Excellent

Tamaulipan Fiddlewood, Negrito

Citharexylum berlandieri

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Shrub Handbook, page 31

Nectar plant: Excellent

Dakota Vervain

Glandularia bipinnatifida = *Verbena bipinnatifida*

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

Height:	10 inches or less, prostrate or leaning
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Full sun
Water:	Low to moderate
Nectar plant:	Good



Fiery Skipper on Dakota Vervain

Desert Lantana, Brushland Lantana

Lantana achyranthifolia = *L. macropoda*)

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Shrub Handbook, page 33

Nectar plant:	Good
Host to:	Gray Hairstreak



Gray Hairstreak on Crucita

Michele's Lantana, Hammock Lantana

Lantana canescens = *L. microcephala*

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

Height:	3-8 ft.
Soil:	Various
Sun:	Partial shade to full sun
Water:	Low to moderate
Nectar plant:	Good



Red-bordered Metalmark on Michele's Lantana

Texas Lantana, Calico Bush

Lantana urticoides = *L. horrida*

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Shrub Handbook, page 32

Nectar plant: Very good

Oregano Cimarron, Redbrush Lippia

Lippia graveolens

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Shrub Handbook, page 34

Nectar plant: Good

Host to:
White Peacock
Lantana Scrub-Hairstreak



Lantana Scrub-Hairstreak on Crucita

Common Frogfruit, Texas Frogfruit

Phyla nodiflora

Silky Leaf Frogfruit, Saw Tooth Frogfruit

Phyla strigulosa

Verbenaceae, Verbena family

See Cacti, Vines and Ground Cover Handbook, page 24;

P. nodiflora was misidentified as *P. incisa*;

P. strigulosa was misidentified as *P. nodiflora*.

Nectar plant: Very good

Host to: Phaon Crescent - *P. nodiflora*

Common Buckeye - *P. nodiflora*

White Peacock - *P. nodiflora* and
P. strigulosa

Phaon Crescent



White Peacock on Texas Lantana

Guayacan, Soapbush

Guaiacum angustifolium

Zygophyllaceae, Caltrop family

See Shrub Handbook, page 25

Host to: Lyside Sulphur

Gray Hairstreak



Lyside Sulphur
on
Betony Leaf
Mistflower

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THE NATIVE PLANT PROJECT
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The Native Plant Project currently holds general meetings eight times per year. Members are advised of meetings, field trips, nature festivals and other activities through *The Sabal*, which conveys information on the native plants, habitats, and the environment of the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas.

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Acknowledgments

Eleanor Mosimann, Ellie Thompson, and Ann Vacek compiled this handbook with the help of Liz Deluna, Martin Hagne, and Eugene Rouse.

Lizee Cavazos, Ellie Thompson, and Ann Vacek generously provided the photographs.

A special thanks goes to Ellie Thompson, without whose help this handbook would still be unfinished.

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