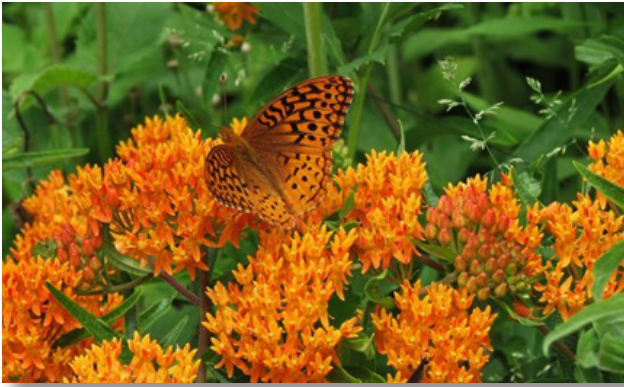


# Create Pollinator-friendly Habitats

Create pollinator-friendly habitat with native flowering plants that supply pollinators with nectar, pollen, and room for nesting. They make our greenspace more enjoyable.



**Milkweed** (*Asclepias*) is a genus of plants that are native to North America and comprise over 100 different species. Their flowers are a highly valuable source of food (nectar) for many pollinators, and their leaves feed many insects during their development. In particular, milkweeds are the sole larval host of the beloved monarch butterfly.

**Butterfly Weed** (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is one of several milkweed species found in Central Virginia. It is a long-lived, herbaceous perennial that grows an abundance of dark green foliage on multiple stems from a large taproot, forming a clump 1½ to 3 ft tall and wide. It's tough, woody, knobby root can grow several feet deep, and was used medicinally by Native Americans. Butterfly Weed needs full sun (6+hours/day) to bloom, forming clusters of bright orange flowers from late spring to early autumn.

Although it prefers sandy soil, Butterfly Weed grows in almost any type of soil, if it is well-drained. It is very drought tolerant once established. Unlike most members of the milkweed genus, Butterfly Weed does not have milky sap. The leaves turn a dull yellow in fall before the stems die back to the ground for the winter. It is best not to cut the foliage back in fall but wait until spring. Plants are slow to emerge late in the spring.

This showy plant makes a great addition to home gardens, rain gardens, and butterfly gardens. They can be planted in masses or combined as an accent with other mid-sized perennials in a sunny border. Butterfly Weed is easy to grow from seed but can also be propagated from root cuttings. Plants will bloom from seed in 2-3 years. They do not transplant well because of their deep taproot.



**Aster** is the common name for a huge group of perennial plants in the *Asteraceae* family. The American Aster genus, *Symphyotrichum*, is the largest subset. The name Aster is derived from the Greek word for “star”, referring to the shape of their daisy-like flowers. They typically bloom in late summer – early fall. Sometimes they are referred to as “Michaelmas Daisies” because their bloom coincides with St. Michael’s feast day of September 29.

Asters provide nectar for many native bees, bumblebees, honeybees. Their foliage also hosts the larval stage of several butterflies, moths and skippers.

They may be erect or have mounding shapes, ranging from 1/2 - 8 ft high and 1 - 3 ft wide. Most asters need full sun, with moist, well-draining soil. Some asters require nutrient-rich soil; others need lean soil. Depending on the species, their flowers may be violet, pink, white or blue. They are low maintenance, particularly after the first growing season.

Asters are wonderful in mass plantings, groups, borders and in containers. They are well-suited to pollinator, butterfly, cottage and cutting Gardens. Asters can be propagated by division, seed, or cuttings. Stems can be left standing over winter and cut back in mid-spring.

The New England Aster (*S. novae-angliae*) and the New York Aster (*S. novae-belgii*) are popular plants that are native to the eastern U.S. The main distinction between them is that the New York Aster has smooth stems and leaves, while the New England Aster’s are hairy. Both plants are upright and multi-stemmed, typically ranging 3 - 4 ft high and 1 - 2 ft wide. These Asters like cool days and nights, so in central Virginia, a partial sun location is preferable. In the wild their flowers are deep-violet colored, but various color hybrids are available.

