Leaf Notes
The Newsletter of Lee County Master Gardeners
Spring 2004

Butterflies in the Garden

by Jayne Rushin

Butterflies in the garden bring flashing color and fluttering flight that create another dimension in the home landscape. Butterflies can give us visual pleasure, and in return, we can provide them with amenable habitat. In recent years, there has been a rather dramatic increase in butterfly gardening as well as an interest in butterfly identification. Nevertheless, today habitat pollution and destruction are the primary threats to butterfly population and diversity. Lepidopterists readily agree that there is much more to be learned about butterflies.

If you are interested in having more than a casual butterfly stopover in your garden, attention should be given to selecting host plants for caterpillars (larvae) as well as to nectar plants for adult butterflies. It is easy to have nectar plants available in a home garden, since butterflies feed on a wide range of plants, including those as common as zinnia and marigold. Butterflies often are attracted to weed patches containing plants that we overlook or consider undesirable. Bright single flowers that are short, tubular and bloom in clusters are easily accessible and appealing to butterflies. A well-designed butterfly garden should include nectar plants for Spring, Summer and Fall.

The most important step in increasing butterfly populations is to include host plants for caterpillars in your plantings. You may have an instant vision of denuded plants and shredded leaves. Even though you may find a *Black Swallowtail* caterpillar munching hardily on the parsley, butterfly caterpillars are not going to eat your azaleas or roses or most of the plants in your garden. Generally, butterfly caterpillars are attracted to native rather than ornamental or agricultural plants. Gardening, like life, is full of choices. A few leaves with holes are worth the rewards. Plant another pot or patch of parsley. However, if you are going to make a butterfly garden, **do not use pesticides**. Butterflies are insects. Don't feed them and poison them at the same time.

Male butterflies of many species are attracted to damp sand where they extract moisture and salts from sand or gravel. Butterflies also like to perch and bask in the sun in a sheltered area. This allows them to raise their body temperature so they can fly. If you don't have a damp sandy spot or a good basking area, it is easy enough to sink a con-

(Continued on page 3)

Congratulations Dr. William B. Shell!!

The Lee County Master Gardeners had the pleasure of nominating Dr. William B. Shell for the 2004 ***"Outstanding Service and Dedication to the Alabama Master Gardener Program Annual Award."*** We are delighted that Dr. Shell has won this recognition. He received this prestigious award in person during the State Master Gardeners Conference at Gulf Shores, AL, on March 19th. It is a real honor for our organization and Lee County.

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Thank You, Jayne!

We would be remiss if we did not say, "Thank You and a job well done" to ***Jayne Rushin****—who has been the editor of "Leaf Notes" from the beginning until the last issue in 2003. She volunteered to start the newsletter and to put it out for a year, then ended up continuing for a couple more years. She has left very large shoes to be filled. We just hope that we can maintain the same quality.*

What's Bugging You?

By Chuck Browne

Chuck Browne

Insects are as much a part of the garden as the garden itself. Many times, the success or failure of our plants depends on insects.

We all know the role the honeybee plays in the pollination of many of our garden plants. The Europeans brought over honeybees when they came to America. This was because many of the plants and crops they also brought needed pollination by honeybees to be successful.

The honeybee is not native to the U.S. or even North America. But then, neither are peach trees, apples or many of our vegetable crops. There are other bees in the U.S. which do pollinate native crops but none as efficiently as the honeybee.

Another bee very similar to the honeybee was brought into Brazil in the 50's from Africa. This bee had a more aggressive work characteristic and reproduced faster. The thought was to interbreed this species with its more docile cousin to create a super pollinator and honey producer. Unfortunately, the African bee also possessed a huge negative trait.

The African bees are easy to agitate and when provoked will vigorously sting the perceived threat. Breeders hoped to dilute this negative trait while keeping the aggressive foraging and honey production traits.

Well, you know the rest of the story. The experiment failed, or was never completed. The bees escaped and moved rapidly north through South America, into Central America and through Mexico. They crossed the Rio Grande into Texas about 1990.

According to scientists, the "Killer Bees" were moving at such a pace that the Southern U.S. should have been infested by now. Fortunately for us, the bees have turned their migration west covering a good bit of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and Southern California.

At this time, their migration eastward has stopped near the Texas/Louisiana border. Exact reasons are unknown but could possibly be due to rainfall. The 52-inch per year rain zone seems to be the limit of their range. Let's hope for us that truly is the case.

(Continued from page 1)

tainer of sand into your garden and to assemble some stones in a sunny sheltered area for basking. If you have a successful butterfly garden, it will also be attractive to hummingbirds. Many of the plants that appeal to butterflies also are a magnet to hummers.

Steps for Building a Butterfly Garden

1. Select a sunny location
2. Plant host plants
3. Plant nectar plants
4. Use no insecticides
5. Create a damp sandy spot
6. Build a sunny basking place
7. Leave an undeveloped patch

Larval Host Plant	Butterfly
Asters (Aster)	Pearl Crescent
Carrot family, parsley, dill, fennel	Black Swallowtail
Hackberries *(Celtis)*	Hackberry Emperor, American Snout,
Milkweed, native/non-native (*Asclepias*)	Monarch
False nettles *(Boehmeria cylindrica)*	Red Admiral
Passion vines, native/non-native (*Passiflora*)	Gulf Fritillary, Variegated Fritillary
Pipevines *(Aristolochia)*	Pipevine Swallowtail
Plantains, snapdragons, monkey flower	Common Buckeye
Spicebush *(Lindera Benzoin*)	Spicebush Swallowtail
Sassafras *(Sassafras albidum*)	Spicebush Swallowtail
Tulip Tree *(Liriodendron tulipifera)*	Eastern Tiger Swallowtail

Nectar Plants

Shrubs

Azalea *(Rhododendron sp.)*
Blueberry *(Vaccinium sp.)*
Butterfly bush *(Buddleia davidii)*
Buttonbush *(Cephalanthus sp.)*
Glossy abelia (*Abelia grandiflora*)
Lantana *(Lantana sp)*

Perennials and Annuals

Bee balm *(Monarda sp.)*
Black-eyed Susan *(Rudbeckia sp.)*
Blazing Star *(Liatris sp.)*
Cosmos *(Cosmos sp.)*
Eupatorium *(Eupatorium sp.)*
Marigold *(Tagetes sp.)*
Heliotrope *(Heliotrope arborescens)*
Impatiens *(Impatiens wallerna)*
Ironweed *(Vernonia sp.)*
Mexican sunflower *(Tithonia rotundifolia)*
Milkweed *(Asclepias sp.)*
New England aster *(Aster novac angliae)*
Pentas *(Pentas lanceolata)*
Pineapple sage *(Salvia rutilans)*
Purple coneflower *(Echinacea purpurea*
Thrift *(Phlox subulata)*
Vervain *(Verbena bonariensis)*
Verbena *(Verbena sp.)*
Wild Petunia *(Ruellia caroliniensis)*
Yarrow *(Achillea millefolium)*
Zinnia *(Zinnia sp.)*
AND MANY MORE

Vines

Coral Honeysuckle *(Lonicera sempervirens)*
Trumpet Vine (C*ampsis radicans)*
Climbing Aster *(Aster carolinianus)*
Scarlet Morning-glory *(Ipomoea ledenifolia)*

(Continued on page 5)

Spring Sings

Watching birds during the breeding season can be a very rewarding and exciting experience. The key to attracting a variety of birds to your yard this time of year is to furnish them with the right mix of ingredients like food, water and shelter. Use these handy tips to help increase the traffic in your habitat this spring & summer.

Spring cleaning | Feeders

All feeders should be cleaned regularly. A glance into the feeding tray, or an absence of birds, can indicate that seed may have gotten wet and probably moldy. Regular cleaning reduces the chance for spreading parasites and disease around feeding stations where many birds congregate. For the same reason, it is important to keep the area beneath the feeder clear of old seed.

TIPS

- A mix of hot water and liquid detergent works great for cleaning feeders. If the feeder is badly clogged, soak it first to help loosen the debris.
- A handful of uncooked rice acts as a good cleansing agent for hard-to-reach places in hummingbird feeders. Fill the feeder with one part vinegar to four parts water solution, add the rice and shake vigorously.
- A variety of brushes will come in handy when it's time to clean. Long-handled brushes work great on tube feeders; bottle and port brushes do the trick on hummingbird feeders, and a short-bristled, stiff brush is excellent for wooden feeders.

Rub a dub dub | Water

Maybe the most effective way to attract birds to your habitat, including birds that migrate, is to provide water. Birds need water year 'round to avoid dehydration, and because they don't have salivary glands, they need water for digesting food. Water is also necessary all year for feather maintenance.

TIPS

- Place your baths reasonably close to shrubbery or trees to provide an easily reached perch to preen in safety.
- If cats are a problem, try not to put baths at ground level.
- Terra cotta saucers, or other shallow items make great baths.
- Try to keep the water level at 2-3 inches. If it's deeper than that, add rocks to the bottom.
- Consider moving water by using a dripper, mister or a pump. Not only will this attract more birds, you won't be breeding mosquitoes!
- Combat algae with a one-part bleach to nine-parts water solution. Scrub and rinse thoroughly.

Give me shelter | Nesting

Without breeding birds we won't have feeding birds. Scatter nest boxes throughout your yard to attract cavity nesters, and offer a variety of materials that will aid them in the nest-building process. It's fun to watch the parents feeding the young at your feeders once they have fledged the nest!

TIPS

- Suitable nesting material: cotton threads no longer than 8" long, thin scrap cloth, feathers from an old down pillow, twine and hair from your hairbrush (or your dog's). Place these items in a suet feeder and hang. Don't offer dryer lint because it retains water.
- Offer eggshells as an added source of calcium that is needed for the reproduction process. Bake shells at 250º for 10 minutes, then crush and spread on the ground or in a platform feeder.

What's for dinner | Food

Don't stop feeding this time of year! After the young have fledged the nest, it's exciting to watch the adults demonstrate how to find seeds and other treats at your backyard feeding station. Your feeders act as a quick source of food for parents that are tending to their young.

TIPS

- Experiment with fruit to attract mockingbirds, catbirds, orioles and tanagers.
- If weeds are growing under your feeders, try serving sunflower meats. No shell means no germination.
- Keep your nectar feeders fresh and full for the hummers. When the nectar is cloudy it's time to change it!
- If your birds love suet, try feeding a dough-based suet so you won't have a melted mess on your hands.

Written by Urban Birding Supply Company. Information Provided by the National Bird-Feeding Society.

MG Spring '04 Observations

By William B. Shell

Here we are entering a new gardening year and I don't think I have looked forward to it with more anticipation. Dr. Jaya Krishnagopalan is the new president of Lee County Master Gardeners. She was the first choice of the selection committee and she took the job without hesitation, and for two years yet. Diane Blue is our incoming secretary/treasurer and she also was our first choice and she also accepted the job with no arm-twisting and also for two years. Now listen to their qualifications. Jaya received her PhD in Chemical Engineering at the University of Maine and is a professor at Tuskegee University. Bright indeed and excited about her new role as president of LCMG. Diane received her first degree at Auburn University in 1972 and her MBA in 1975. She qualified for her CPA in 1988. She worked for the Alabama Department of Revenue and was the Field Activities Manager for the Income Tax Division prior to her retirement. Now get this, Jaya and Diane along with Gita Smith are editors of LCMG quarterly newsletter. They want this newsletter to continue the high standards that were established by Jayne Rushin over the last three years. And a note here, they are seeking articles to publish in the newsletter that will be germane to our MGs. If you have an interest in a particular subject that you think would benefit our MGs, then contact Diane or Jaya.

Over the last few weeks I have spent time with Jaya and Diane and also with Barbara Whatley who tends four acres just outside Tuskegee. Barbara is exciting to be around. Her enthusiasm is contagious and she has a real commitment to making our demonstration garden at Kiesel the best ever. Along with these three ladies, I can hardly wait to get started. These three are busy propagating plants for Auburn Citifest. Barbara says her Golden Raintree seeds have sprouted and will be a foot high by Citifest time. Good stuff!

Now a word about our new Master Gardener class of 2004. I am attending all sessions and trying to assist Chuck Browne in his efforts. During the second session, Kerry Smith, our new State Director, gave a presentation as to what Master Gardening is all about. Now hear this! Kerry is top notch. Oh, is she ever exciting to listen to. I think having her housed in Funches Hall here in Auburn will give great impetus to our club. Listening to Kerry really makes you want to be the best Master Gardener you can be.

The '04 class has some really outstanding people. I just know that they will make a fine contribution throughout the rest of this year and years to come. One thing that I think is an excellent idea is Chuck having class members work in the extension office for about 20 of their volunteer hours manning the phones and answering questions for the public. Sounds tough, but since Chuck started this last year , all I've heard are good things from the MGs.

I know this. If all of us were to get the "fever" as have Jaya, Diane and Barbara, we could accomplish much.

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Happy Growing!!

(Continued from page 3)

Conservation Groups

The Xerces Society, 4828 Southeast Hawthorne Blvd., Portland, OR 97215.
The Nature Conservancy, 1815 Lynn Street, Arlington, VA 22209.

Butterfly Organizations

The North American Butterfly Association (NABA), 4 Delaware Road, Morristown, NJ 07960.
The Lepidopterists' Society, 9417 Carvalho Court, Bakersfield, CA 93311

Field Guides

Butterflies through Binoculars, The East, By Jeffrey Glassberg
Butterflies of North America, By Jim P. Brock and Kenn Kaufman
Eastern Butterflies, Peterson Field Guide Series, By Paul A. Opler

A Fire Ant Experiment Begins

By Gita Smith

We have 12 acres, and fire ants have set up housekeeping on about eight of those acres (the ones we like to use most, as it happens). Over the past three years, my husband and I have spent the equivalent of the gross national product of Belgium on ant killers: Orthene, Spectracide, Amdro -- you name it. On some of our land, where we don't care what grows, we have even poured gasoline on the mounds. But despite claims that they kill the queen and the mound (and all their descendants for all of eternity), none of those products have controlled the fire ant problem on our land.

In 2002, when I was in Chuck Browne's Master Gardener class, he mentioned that an international conference was underway to consider new solutions to fire ants. I was pretty excited by that. Whatever they come up with, I told Chuck, I want my property to be an experimental plot.

Now, two years later, I'm tired of waiting for the bigwigs to show up in my driveway with the flies that tear off the ants' heads, or whatever biological solution they discussed at that conference. I am taking matters into my own hands.

I am pinning my hopes on a silvery-blue, 10-lb bag that promises one spring application will give us relief all season long. The name of the product is Over 'N Out! Normally I don't go for products with cute punctuation in the name. But there's a money back guarantee on the bag; as long as I keep the sales slip and the label, TechPac LLC of Lexington, KY, promises I can get a refund.

Over 'N Out! costs $19.44 for enough granular fire ant bait to cover 5,000 square feet. The cost to treat our property is going to be astronomical, I realize. But I am willing to make this investment now just to have one summer free of ant bites.

I checked the active ingredients on this and several other labels, curious whether this was an old product repackaged, or something new. The active ingredient is Fipronil (short for something with 75 syllables) and is not found in the older fire ant products.

The applications start this month. I will mark (flag) the mounds and keep notes through this coming summer. In fall, I'll report back to Leaf Notes readers on the efficacy of Over 'N Out!

Upcoming Events

Saturday, April 3, 2004: Lee County Master Gardeners are planning a Tour of Gardens in conjunction with the Rhododendron Club (weather permitting). Tour will commence at 8:00 a.m. from Caroline Dean's house to the Auburn Gardens and finish at Tom Corley's. Call or e-mail Jaya for directions.
Friday, April 9, 2004: Field Trip to Jemison, AL — Petals of the Past Nursery– contact Chuck Browne if you would like to travel with the '04 class.
Saturday, April 24, 2004: Citifest – MG Plant Sale
Thursday, July 15, 2004: Tour of Tom Corley's cabin and yard; pot luck supper.