

BOYCE MEADOW PLANTS

PERENNIALS

Asclepias tuberosa - Butterfly Weed



Native to the American prairies, butterfly weed is a tough, drought-tolerant perennial, growing 2-3 feet tall and 2 feet wide. Tangerine orange flowers bloom for six weeks in mid to late summer, followed by bean-shaped, inflated, ornamental fruits that split to expose abundant, silky seeds. Plants often will self-sow. Fruits should be removed before splitting, if seeding is not desired.

Hardy to USDA zone 4 (-30 degrees F), butterfly weed is a low maintenance plant best grown in acidic sandy to average soil in full sun. Good drainage is a necessity, especially in winter. Because this plant develops a taproot, like a carrot, butterfly weed is able to withstand dry weather and should not be moved or divided, once established. Plants break dormancy late each spring. Do not cut plants back in fall for winter. Instead, do this in the spring.

Bees and many other insects feed on the nectar of butterfly weed flowers. Additionally, this plant is the food source for the monarch butterfly caterpillar, which eats its leaves.

Butterfly weed is an excellent cut flower and cutting flowers results in additional flowering on plants. To extend the vase life of cut flowers, place cuttings in warm water and then chill in the refrigerator for twelve hours. Stem ends also can be flamed to seal off milky sap.