

TIME TO START THAT BUTTERFLY GARDEN!

By Soni Holladay

Trust the Cockrell Butterfly Center at the Houston Museum of Natural Science in Hermann Park to perfectly time its Spring Plant Sale with the Monarch and other butterfly explosions in this area.

Check out our list of great butterfly attractors that will be available at the sale, 9 a.m.-noon, Saturday, April 6, on the 7th Level of the HMNS Parking Garage:

#1 Hairy wedelia (*Zexmenia hispida*). Perennial bush, 2 ft, Hill Country native, full sun, drought-tolerant (Translation: needs to be very well drained and don't overwater!). One inch wide yellow flowers spring through fall. Dies back in the winter. Give good haircut in spring.

#2, *Gaillardia pulchella* or Mexican Blanket. Mounding clumps, 2-ft. flower stalks spring to fall. Full sun, don't overwater. Save seed heads to replant next spring.

#3, Red Porter Weed (*Stachytarpheta* sp.). Red spiked blooms, usually comes back from roots in spring if well mulched in winter. Sun, 3 fot. tall

#4, Purple trailing lantana (*Lantana montevidensis*). 2-3' wide, blooms almost year-round, full sun or part shade, don't overwater, cutting back once a year recommended.

#5, Purple stokes aster (*Stokesia laevis*) or Purple Stokes Aster. 3-inch purple flowers with white centers, 1-foot high plants, drought tolerant. Also good for bees.

#6, Mexican sunflower (*Tithonia rotundifolia*). This is the one the Cockrell always brings to the big annual Bulb & Plant Mart. 3+-foot stalks that usually need staking but brilliant orange flowers are so worth it. Full sun. One of best general butterfly nectar plants. Annual, save the seeds.

#7, Family Jewels milkweed (*Asclepias physocarpa*). Seriously good host plant for Monarch and Queen caterpillars. Four feet, pinkish-white flowers. Light shade in afternoon. Seed pods give name "family jewels"

#8, Candlestick cassia (*Cassia alata*). Fast growing, tender, 8' perennial tree, host for bright yellow Sulphurs. Blooms late spring through fall

#9, Bronze fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) Host plant for black Swallowtails (who also like fennel, parsley, dill, carrot leaves and rue). Purplish feathery cloud, which looks striking in the landscape. Bronze fennel can grow to be a two to three foot mounding shrub and can even last as a perennial. In full sun it grows more compact and gives off a licorice smell.

#10, Love-in-a-Mist passion flower (*Passiflora foetida*). Passion vines are host plants for native longwing – the Gulf Fritillary., However, some passion vines are not as favored by the caterpillars as others. The best ones for the Gulf Fritillary larvae are 'Incense', blue passion flower, native passion vine (*P. incarnata*) and *P. foetida*. Foetida's fuzzy leaves give off a "skunky" odor - hence the species name: foetida or fetid. The common name, "Love-In-A-Mist" comes from the way the lacy sepals (Google it) cover the bright red fruits, like love in a misty shroud. The delicate pink blooms occur in clusters, which is somewhat unusual for passion flowers – and smell a little bit like bubblegum. More controlled growth than other passion vines.

Go early to the sale — the plants don't last for long — and bring a wagon! Free parking in the garage for sales of \$30 or more.

<http://www.hmns.org>. Click on Butterfly Center.

Soni Holladay is Horticulturist/Greenhouse manager at the Cockrell Butterfly Center.