

Florida Butterflies Sheet 1 ¹

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More than 100 species of butterflies occur in Florida. Many can be found throughout the state for most of the year and are easily attracted to various species of nectar-producing plants. Such flowers may be planted in a "butterfly garden" along with the food plants of the caterpillars to attract the adult butterflies. Ornamental and garden plants with flowers especially attractive to butterflies include butterfly bush, orange milkweed, pentas, zinnia, lantana, plumbago, shrimp plant and many of the asters. A more thorough discussion of Florida butterflies and their food and nectar plants can be found in IFAS Special Series Fact Sheet SS-WIS-22, *Butterfly Gardening In Florida*.

Cloudless sulphur. This caterpillar is 1-1/2" to 2" long when fully developed (Plate 1). It has a pebbly surface and bears a distinct lateral yellow stripe running the length of the body. Larvae feed on *Cassia* spp., favoring sicklepod and partridge pea.

The large yellow butterfly has a wingspan of 2" to 2-1/2" (Plate 2). It migrates through Florida annually and can be found in the state for most of the year. It shows a preference for red blossoms such as



Plate 1. Cloudless sulphur caterpillar. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida

those of the shrimp plant, railroad vine, Turk's cap and hibiscus.

Giant swallowtail. This caterpillar is 1-1/2" to 2" long when mature and has a blotchy brown-and-white pattern (Plate 3). It looks remarkably like a bird dropping throughout its larval stages. These caterpillars feed primarily on citrus and are called "orange dogs" because they are commonly found in orange groves.

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Plate 2. Cloudless sulphur butterfly. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida



Plate 3. Giant swallowtail caterpillar. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida

The adult has a wingspan of 3-1/2" to 5-1/2" (Plate 4). The upper surface of the wings is brown with a row of large yellow spots along the margins and a prominent diagonal yellow band. The undersurface of the wings appears bright yellow. It is often seen taking moisture at mud puddles and at damp sand.



Plate 4. Giant swallowtail butterfly. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida

Gulf fritillary. This caterpillar is 1-1/4" to 1-3/4" at maturity and has an orange body with several rows of black spines along the entire length (Plate 5). The food plant is passion vine, and it lays its eggs on or near any part of the plant.



Plate 5. Gulf fritillary caterpillar. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida

The adult butterfly is 2-1/2" to 3" long and has orange wings with black markings on the upper surface (Plate 6). The undersurface of the wings is brown with many large silvery-white spots. It overwinters in south Florida and migrates north in the spring.



Plate 6. Gulf fritillary butterfly. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida

Longtailed skipper. This caterpillar, known as the bean leafroller, is commonly found on different varieties of beans. Other legumes also serve as food plants, including wisteria and hairy indigo. The distinctive caterpillar is 1" to 1-1/2" long and has a large brown, rounded head (Plate 7). The body is light-green with parallel yellow lines down the back.

This butterfly is brown with several silvery spots on the front wings and a silvery white edge along the



Plate 7. Longtailed skipper caterpillar. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida

hindwings (Plate 8). The wingspan is 1" to 1-1/4", but the hind wings terminate in two narrow tails about 1/2" long. The upper surface of the wings is a metallic blue-green. The longtailed skipper is found throughout Florida.



Plate 8. Longtailed skipper butterfly. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida

Zebra longwing. This caterpillar reaches a length of 1-1/2" to 1-3/4" (Plate 9). It is white above and brown below with several rows of black spines that run the entire length of the body, interspersed with black spots. The eggs are laid on the new growth of passion vines, which serve as the larval food plant.

The adult butterfly is about 2-1/2" to 3-1/2" long (Plate 10). The wings are long and oval with prominent yellow bands and rows of yellow spots on the upper surface. The same markings occur on the underside of the wings, but are less vivid. It occurs throughout the state during most of the year.



Plate 9. Zebra longwing caterpillar. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida



Plate 10. Zebra longwing butterfly. Credits: J. L. Castner, University of Florida