

The Butterfly Garden at Lee County Extension Service: A History

Gayle Edwards
Master Gardener

Stephen H. Brown
Master Gardener Coordinator

In the Beginning

In the beginning, there was an old parking lot. In 1992, Master Gardener Barbara Presnell was hired as the Horticulture Specialist for Lee County Extension Service. That same year, Barbara applied for and received a \$500 grant from the Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association. Along with her late husband, Ozzie, and with that \$500, they started to create a bit of beauty from that old parking lot. Master Gardeners Leo Issacks, Martin Gounley, Jr. and Sr., Ed Welk and Clarence Jahnsen assisted Barbara and Ozzie in bringing the paper drawing to life. Barbara's "Gallon Garden" for butterflies, birds, and people became a reality. In 1999, Barbara retired from her position as the Horticulture Specialist and was not able to continue her work in the garden.

1999

Under the guidance of Lee County Extension Agent, Stephen Brown, 1999 Master Gardener Trainees Linda Ballou, Sandy Hoath, Marcia Meechem, Ed Newland and Bob Wagner took on the project of refreshing the Butterfly Garden with some new plants, an arbor, gazebo, trellises and new sidewalks constructed of broken pieces of concrete and asphalt with hand mixed mortar. It may have been those sidewalks but when the project was completed, Sandy Hoath was the only remaining volunteer in the Butterfly Garden. Master Gardener Debbie Hughes gave a helping hand until Gayle Edwards and George Massing joined Sandy in the weekly maintenance. Master Gardener Vic Estoye kindly donated the garden bench and still supply the garden with home-grown annuals. That year, the Life Cycle of the Giant Swallowtail pictorial was added.

2000-2001



The South side of Butterfly Garden as it appeared in 2001.



The South side of the Butterfly Garden as it appears in 2003

In 2000, new cement sidewalks replaced the old broken asphalt sidewalks. This helped create a damming effect in the south end of the Butterfly Garden, parallel to the Extension building, causing flooding in the building. The south end of the original butterfly garden was bulldozed with the loss of some mature trees. The grade was lowered and another concrete sidewalk and fence were constructed. This was yet another opportunity to "recreate" the garden. The plants now growing in this section of the garden represent what is needed for a good basic butterfly garden in southwest Florida.

2002

Native plants grew well in the north end of the garden where the soil was particularly thin because of the old parking lot. In January 2002, Gayle Edwards received a \$250 project grant from Coccoloba Chapter of the Florida Native Society. This was a timely contribution to the “new” section of the garden. Also that year, the old six-foot fence was removed and replaced with a shorter four-foot fence that casts less shadows on the garden.

Presently



Gayle Edwards, George Massing and Barbara Shafer in the Butterfly Garden.

In 2002, Master Gardener Barbara Shafer joined George Massing and Gayle Edwards as regular volunteers in the garden. Barbara Shafer is responsible for potting and tending volunteer plants found growing in the garden. Happily, Barbara Presnell returned to help maintain the garden. The team can be found every Tuesday mornings working to make the Butterfly Garden still more beautiful and educational.

During our hot steamy summer months, Master Gardeners Jerry Jovanovich, Lelia Graham, Anita Marshall and Kelly Leary, as well as current Horticulture Specialist Peggy Cruz, have provided for the care of the garden.

The garden now has almost equal numbers of native and nonnative plants throughout. It has more than 110 different varieties of larval and nectar plants. The wax myrtle, a bougainvillea, the Barbados flowerfence, and Boston ferns are plants from the original 1992 garden.

This Butterfly Garden is an ever-changing palette, a work in progress. We hope to inspire and educate. For a project to succeed there has to be a passion for it. We have that passion and we think the garden is beautiful, we know the butterflies do.



Tours in the Butterfly Garden is an ongoing affair.