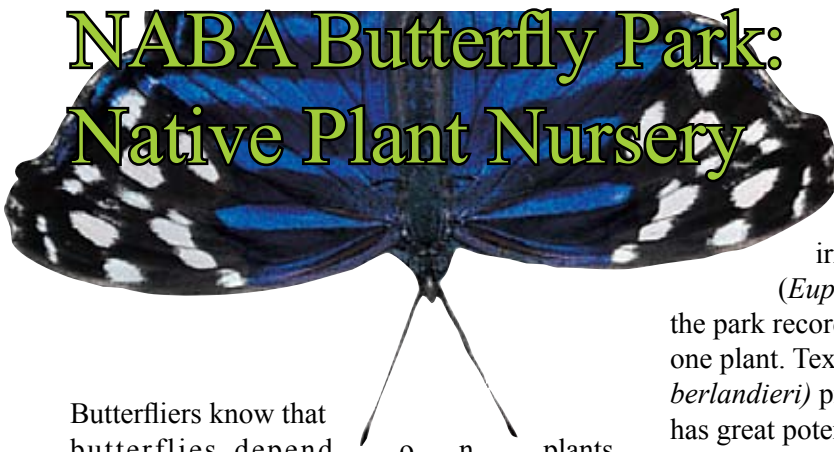


NABA Butterfly Park: Native Plant Nursery



by Javier de Leon

Butterflies know that butterflies depend on plants every day of their lives. However, most people are unaware that using native plants in their landscaping will not only attract butterflies to their garden, but also create breeding populations if they simply provide the right host plants. The Butterfly Park recently created a native plant nursery with funds provided by the Stanley Smith Horticultural Trust to promote the use of native plants in urban landscapes of the Rio Grande Valley.

Most visitors to the Butterfly Park are surprised to learn that all but three plant species used at the butterfly park are plants that are native to the Lower Rio Grande Valley. When a member of the Park staff mentions our new native plant nursery, visitors immediately ask if we sell a particular plant that they enjoyed seeing in the garden. Visitors usually leave the Park with a new hostplant or a popular nectar plant for their home garden.

In less than one year, the Park already offers 40 different species of plants for sale. These include ground covers, low bushes, hedge plants, vines, and trees that not only look great, but are used by butterflies. Popular nectar plants include the

Opposite top:
Fiddlewood

Opposite bottom:
Javier de Leon documenting
new additions to the nursery.

irresistible mistflower, (or crucita) (*Eupatorium odoratum*) which holds the park record of 67 butterfly species seen on one plant. Texas fiddlewood (*Citharexylum berlandieri*) provides excellent nectar and has great potential as a hedge plant. Other nectar plant favorites available are Texas lantana (*Lantana horrida*), bettony mistflower (*Eupatorium betonicifolium*), and low croton (*Croton humilis*). Hostplants for sale can be used by over thirty species of butterflies including Mexican Silverspots, Malachites, Goodson's Greenstreaks, and of course, Mexican Bluewings.

The combination of great looking plants and the likelihood of many dozens of butterflies present at any time of the year has prompted several local city governments to inquire about using butterfly plants in their new landscape projects. The Park's education coordinator, Carol Goolsby, designed a beautiful garden for the City of South Padre Island, and is currently working on projects in Brownsville and Corpus Christi.

Aside from promoting the use of native plants for private use, one of the main focuses of the nursery is to acquire and propagate unusual native plants that are rarely, if ever, cultivated in order to broaden the palette of plants available for the Butterfly Park's current and future gardens. Nursery staff are currently experimenting with ways to propagate chomonque (*Gochnatia hypoleuca*) and the federally endangered Walker's manioc (*Manihot walkerae*). Chomonque is a native two-lipped composite that grows to be an attractive tall shrub. It is reported as an excellent nectar source in areas where it is found in the wild. Even though the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hopes to include this plant in their revegetation projects, it is still not known how to propagate chomonque in a

nursery. The Butterfly Park nursery is one of three nurseries in the area that is attempting to grow chomonque from seed.

The Park's nursery was fortunate enough to receive several specimens of a rare plant whose numbers may not exceed over 500 in the wild within the United States. Several specimens of Walker's manioc (*Manihot walkerae*) were donated to the Butterfly Park by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to use as an educational tool. The specimens of this federally protected species are being grown under a cooperative agreement with USFWS. Seeds are collected from the plants on display in order to grow seedlings and eventually re-introduce this plant to places where it once occurred.

As the Butterfly Park develops, the nursery will play an ever more important roll by providing a diverse selection of plant species for new gardens. It will also be a source of plants for Butterfly Park programs, such as the butterfly gardens the Butterfly Park's staff is developing at public facilities



Jeffrey Glassberg

across the Rio Grande Valley. And last, but not least, it will provide an economic resource to help sustain the work of the Butterfly Park.



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