

Rita and I have excitingly been growing it in our landscape for years. In fact, it



is one of our favorite flowering perennials. Of late, it has caught the attention of the Perennial Plant Association. This non-profit, organization had its beginning in 1920. Since 1990, this esteemed gardening organization began selecting a particular perennial plant and declaring it the Perennial Plant of the Year™. The association's goal is to highlight a flowering perennial that is not only a standout among its competitors but suitable for a wide range of growing climates, requires low

maintenance, has multiple-season interest, and is relatively pest/disease-free. The Perennial Plant Association recently declared it the perennial plant of the year for 2017. It, just so happens to be *Asclepias tuberosa*, more commonly called butterfly milkweed and often termed butterfly weed.

I really dislike it when a desirable plant has the word weed in its name. I have always felt that, for most gardeners, just seeing or hearing the word weed, and particularly in the plant's name, creates a negative connotation. Believe me; butterfly milkweed is far from undesirable.



Rita and I not only grow this flowering perennial for its unrivaled beauty, but we also grow it for its

notable value to Mother Nature. Butterfly milkweed is a pollinator plant. A host of pollinator insects including bees and butterflies also enjoy its attractive flowers.

With overwhelming attention recently directed toward the fate of the monarch butterfly, this plant takes on greater significance. I truly enjoy seeing the foliage of our butterfly milkweed plants riddled with holes— a strong indication that monarch butterfly caterpillars are munching away. I never spray our butterfly milkweed with insecticides.



Butterfly milkweed is relatively easy to grow. It thrives best in full sun and in well-drained soil. This plant is indigenous to most of the continental United States and is rated hardy by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Zones 4-9. Its bright reddish-orange flower clusters grace the flower border throughout most of the summer. Deadheading helps to lengthen its bloom time but is generally not necessary. The plants reach a height of two to three feet; therefore, I recommend placing them near the back of the flower border.

Toward the close of summer, the plant develops elongated seedpods. Although these seedpods by themselves are striking in appearance, if allowed to mature, they are also capable of readily self-seeding. If unwanted, I suggest removing the seedpods before they open and disperse their numerous silky-haired seeds.

If one does not have *Asclepias tuberosa* currently growing in one's flower border, I strongly suggest that all area gardeners plant and grow butterfly milkweed.

Rest assured this perennial flowering plant is not a weed. Furthermore, growing it will help to replenish the population of the monarch butterfly while at the same time providing one with the opportunity to revel in the beauty of such an outstanding Perennial Plant of the Year™ — for 2017!