

Fall Flowers Are Fabulous!

October is my favorite month to visit the Butterfly Garden. Many plants and flowers are at the height of their blooming period and butterflies are abundant. It's a good time to see migrating butterflies like Monarchs and Painted Ladies, and it is also the best time to see southern strays, like Southern Dogface and Mallow Scrub-hairstreaks. Every year is slightly different and while Southern Dogface has been seen every fall since we've been keeping the records, many of the others are only occasionally found. That makes it all the more exciting to see something unusual!

Monarch migration peaks in October here in Texas, as butterflies from much farther north head for the mountains of Mexico where they will spend the winter. The Monarchs you see in October will feed heavily on many different nectar sources to fuel the long journey south. Again, each year is different, and you might see large numbers or only a few on any given day. In the Butterfly Garden, Monarchs are easy to find on their favorite nectar sources – typically Goldenrod or Frostweed. If there's a late bloom on the Roosevelt Weed (*Baccharis neglecta*), you will also find Monarchs and other pollinators swarming all over its cottony, white blossoms. By late in the month, the travelers will move on, following their instinctive drive to reach their winter home high in the mountains west of Mexico City. After the long winter, Monarchs will mate on their way north, and only then will they look for emerging milkweed on which to lay their eggs.



Monarchs on Frostweed

Gregg's Mistflower (*Conoclinium greggi*) reaches its peak abundance just before the first frost and it will have many butterfly species searching for the sweetest blooms. Usually, these are the smaller butterflies, like Fiery Skippers, Sachems, Bordered Patch, Dainty Sulphurs, and Gray Hairstreaks, but



Bordered Patch on Gregg's Mistflower

many other species from American Ladies and Gulf Fritillaries to Monarchs will also be found feasting on Mistflower. Queens, which are closely related to Monarchs, also search out Gregg's Mistflower, making it a favorite for any home butterfly garden.

On the front edge of the garden, the Turk's Cap (*Malvaviscus arboreus v. drummondii*) has been blooming since mid-summer and will continue until the temperatures drop below freezing. In the garden you'll find both red and pink varieties, and both are attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds. Large, lemon-colored

Cloudless Sulphurs will be moving from blossom to blossom from morning until sunset. Gulf Fritillaries and Pipevine Swallowtails also favor this plant. A few unusual butterflies have been found on the Turk's Cap, including the only records of Large Orange Sulphur (a Rio Grand Valley native) and Brazilian Skipper (a tropical skipper).

If you visit the garden, be sure to check out the Rock Rose (*Pavonia lasiopetala*) in the parking lot, opposite the Turk's Cap. This is a well-established shrub that dies back in winter, but returns even larger every spring. It has been popular with photographers this summer because its blooms attract hummingbirds. In fall, you will find many skippers, sulphurs, and fritillaries feeding there as well.



Pipevine Swallowtail on Turk's Cap



Sleepy Orange on Rock Rose

Fall Asters (*Symphyotrichum oblongifolium*) are late bloomers, as their name implies. Their large mounds of purple flowers attract many types of butterflies, including sulphurs, skippers, Checkered Whites, Pearl and Phaon Crescents, and Common Buckeyes. Frostweed (*Verbesina virginica*) is a little harder to get close to because it grows at the back edges of the garden, but it has tall, white flower heads that are very popular with all types of hairstreaks, ladies, Queens, and Monarchs. Many other plants will still be blooming in October as well, and each of them may attract butterflies and other pollinators looking for nectar. You could also see a few butterflies looking for a host plant to support their next generation.

I'll be visiting the garden several times each week in October, checking for southern strays and new county butterflies. You will also find volunteers working in the garden each Wednesday morning. Stop by and say "hello" while you enjoy the many butterflies and blooms!

NOTE: Information about butterflies that may be seen in Grayson County and on the refuge is available at <https://www.friendsofhagerman.com/Butterflies>.



Phaon Crescent on Fall Aster