

Cypress Gardens Butterfly House

Self-guided Tour

A little bit about the Butterfly House...

The Butterfly House opened in 1997 and is home to hundreds of free-flying butterflies. Within the 2,500 sq. foot greenhouse, there are many species of butterflies, birds, and native and tropical plants. This environment provides a unique opportunity to observe butterfly behavior up close and the relationships between insects and plants.

Rules

- 1) Please close the door behind you and don't let any butterflies outside.
*We are required to have a permit in order to operate the Butterfly House. The permit states that all plants, animals, and any parts of them (i.e. flowers or wings), must remain inside the Butterfly House.

- 2) Please don't touch the butterflies.
*Butterflies have very delicate wings that are covered in powdery scales. The wings can be damaged easily which reduces the butterfly's ability to fly well. A butterfly doesn't usually die immediately after touching it, but its lifespan will be shortened if it can't feed from flowers or escape from predators as well. The lifespan of a butterfly is short to begin with, most only live two weeks or less as an adult.

- 3) Please do not pick the flowers.
*They are food for the butterflies and can no longer produce nectar once picked.

- 4) No running, horseplay, etc...
*Both butterflies and baby birds crossing the path have been crushed by people moving too quickly or distractedly through the building.

The Butterflies

A few of the butterflies are raised in the Butterfly House. The majority of our butterflies are purchased from butterfly farms. They are shipped here as pupae (chrysalids) and placed inside the Butterfly House where they will emerge and live out their lives.

Butterfly life cycle

Egg >caterpillar(larva)>chrysalis(pupa)>adult

Identification Signs

There are signs throughout the Butterfly House. Be sure to have your students read the signs or please read/interpret the signs for them. The signs are packed with great information and may answer most of the students' questions.

Two signs display the pictures, names, and information of butterflies you will see in the Butterfly House. Another sign compares the differences between butterflies, moths, and skippers.

Next to the live chrysalids (pupal stage of the butterfly), are signs with photos of various chrysalids and the name and photo of the butterfly that will emerge from each.

Next to the host plants (where the butterflies lay their eggs) is a sign with photos of a few caterpillars and the particular plant each eats.

There is also a sign to identify the birds and pond animals (turtles and fish) in the Butterfly House.

The Plants

There are numerous native and tropical plants inside the Butterfly House. These plants can be placed in three general categories: nectar plants, host plants, and ornamental plants.

We have many species of butterfly nectar plants such as lantana, pentas, salvia, etc.... A butterfly drinks nectar from flowers with its long straw-like proboscis (tongue). This provides the nutrients a butterfly needs to live. (Some butterflies will also drink from fallen fruit and we have a couple of fruit trees growing in the Butterfly House as well).

Host plants are the plants on which butterflies lay their eggs and which caterpillars eat. Butterfly caterpillars are picky eaters so in order for the butterflies to lay eggs, we must provide the kind of host plants that are used by the kind of butterflies we display. (i.e. Monarch butterflies will use only Milkweed plants, Longwings use Passionvine).

The Butterfly House also has quite a few ornamental plants that are interesting and worth enjoying such as the Bird of Paradise and several orchids.

Arthropod Exhibit

There is a large wall display that describes arthropods (Crustaceans, Spiders, Millipedes, Centipedes, and Insects); what they are, how many there are in the world, their importance to us, etc... The exhibit includes some preserved specimens and usually a couple of live ones (The live ones are often on display in the Nature Center to avoid the temperature extremes that sometimes occur in the Butterfly House).

Observation Beehive

There is a small beehive behind glass where students can see bees working up close.

There is one queen (the hive replaces her periodically with a new one), but we usually do not mark her. To find her, look for a bee with a much longer abdomen (last section of the body) than the other bees. Her abdomen is longer because she lays the eggs. She is also usually surrounded by 5-10 other bees (attendants) facing and touching her.

There is a tunnel along the bottom of the hive for the bees to travel through to get outside of the Butterfly House and collect nectar and pollen from the plants growing in the gardens and swamp. If it is a sunny day, look for pollen grains on the legs of bees that are returning from visiting the flowers. You will also see (and smell!!) honey inside some of the cells in the hive. The jar next to the hive is sugar water we provide for the bees to drink when there are fewer flowers growing outside; they access the liquid through a screen under the jar.

Before you leave, did you see...?

*The pond with fish, turtles, and a wood duck? (The wood duck was raised here after his mother was hit by a car. It is the same kind of duck that lives in our swamp, but this one has no fear of humans or other animals and can't be released.)

*The emergence box where we hang the butterfly chrysalids? (You may get to see a butterfly spread its wings for the first time!)

* The caterpillar crossing pagoda with live eggs and caterpillars? (If a butterfly lands and touches one of these plants with its abdomen, watch for it to deposit a tiny white or yellow egg on the leaf. Also, the caterpillars can be any size, depending on how long it's been since they hatched from their eggs, so look carefully for them as they crawl along and eat the plants).