

Enclave Butterfly Report: Meet The Gulf Fritillary

By Elizabeth White Olsen

Summer 2024 Leaves of Fall Creek Newsletter

Since its Grand Opening, Enclave Butterfly Garden has been alive with butterflies. One particularly striking butterfly we've been seeing is the Gulf Fritillary. The blooms it visits most often are Blanketflower (*Gailardia pulchella*, red and yellow flowers), Lanceleaf Coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*, yellow), Aquatic Milkweed (*Asclepias perennis*, white), and Gulf Vervain (*Verbena xutha*, purple). If you'd like to see more butterflies out your living room window, plant these flowers and the butterflies will come quickly!

Gulf Fritillaries are often confused with Monarchs, since both are orange. The easiest way to tell them apart is by their flight speed. Gulf Fritillaries typically zip by, whereas Monarchs often fly slowly, almost drowsily. The reason for this difference is Monarchs are larger than Gulf Fritillaries and have larger wings. Having larger wings means Monarchs can soar, and they often do. Gulf Fritillaries may glide for a moment, but they never "soar." They "flit" (a potentially helpful mnemonic device: "Fritillaries flit"). They act as if they're trying to get to their destination as quickly as possible and never slow down and seem to just "enjoy the ride," as Monarchs can seem to do.

Up close, you can tell these butterflies apart by the markings on their wings. Gulf Fritillaries lack the "stained glass effect"—the thick black lines, which are so pronounced on Monarchs' wings. But the most striking difference is that the Gulf Fritillary has silver spots that flash when the sun catches them right, stunning both potential predators and human admirers. If you see a flash of silver on an orange butterfly, you've got a Gulf Fritillary. There's no other butterfly like it.

An even better way to attract this butterfly to your yard is to plant Passionflower vine, its host plant (the plant it eats when still a caterpillar). Just make sure you buy a Passionflower that has purple, white, or blue flowers (such as *Passiflora incarnata*, *foetida*, or *lutea*)—and never red, because non-native Passionflower that have red flowers will end up killing the caterpillars.

Of course, if you'd rather see this gorgeous butterfly without needing to do any gardening, you can always check out Enclave Butterfly Garden (at 3600 Mesa Drive, by "the small pool"), where on a sunny day, you're likely to see Gulf Fritillaries, Skippers, Duskywings, and other great butterflies sipping happily from the flowers.



Butterfly artwork by Elizabeth White Olsen.