

tips & quips
about our
environment
and its
inhabitants

NATURE'S reflections

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CLOUDLESS SULPHURS

One of Florida's many winged wonders

Cloudless Sulphur (*Phoebis sennae*) is a medium-sized yellow butterfly with a wingspan of two to three inches and a fast, powerful flight. Males are virtually solid yellow above and below and have few visible markings. Females may be yellow, greenish-white, yellow-orange, or white with a black margin on the upper side of its wings. While a common year-round resident in much of Florida, some migrate northward each spring to establish breeding colonies in Canada and the Midwest. When cooler autumn weather approaches, adults from the final generation begin a return migration, coming back south to overwinter.

Adult Cloudless Sulphurs feed by sipping nectar from flowers. Although it seems to show a preference for red blossoms such as those of the bottlebrush, hibiscus, and Turk's cap, other nectar sources include bougainvillea, azalea, Mexican sage, shrimp plant, and golden dewdrop.

Whitish elongated eggs are deposited singly on the leaves of host plants. After six days a long, slender green or yellow caterpillar with a narrow yellow stripe down each side and covered with small black bumps known as tubercles emerges. Larvae feed on cassia, favoring sicklepod and partridge pea. The adult life cycle is approximately one month to a year.

Of more than 765 species of butterflies found in North America, Florida has over 160 breeding species, including forty that are unique to the state with another 200 species that have been recorded passing through. Florida has the highest number of butterflies of any state east of the Mississippi River which makes this a premier location for butterfly gardeners.

Most adult butterflies rely on flower nectar for food. Some are attracted to a variety of brightly colored blossoms, while others have distinct color preferences and feeding behaviors. As a rule, small butterflies nectar from small flowers and large butterflies nectar from larger ones. A wide mix of flower colors, shapes, and sizes provides appealing and accessible food to a greater number of butterfly species. It also makes your garden more eye-catching. Larval (caterpillar) host plants are also a key ingredient to any well-designed butterfly garden. While nectar plants invite butterflies into your garden, host plants offer them a reason to stay and reproduce. 🌿

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