

ZEBRA LONGWING

Did you know that Florida has a state butterfly? In 1996, Governor Lawton Chiles designated the Zebra Longwing (*Heliconius charitonius*) as Florida's official state butterfly. This butterfly is found in great numbers throughout the state during any time of the year. With its slow, graceful flight, this butterfly is easy to identify and fun to watch. By planting the proper plants in your landscape, you too can attract the Zebra Longwing to your yard and enjoy its beautiful presence.

Fittingly named, the Zebra Longwing, is a black butterfly with yellow-white stripes and elongated wings. It prefers to roam around forest edges and woodland trails, rarely spending long periods of time in a sunny location. However, they are also frequent visitors to shady gardens and yards.

The Zebra Longwing is the only known butterfly to establish colonies. It is found to rest on tips of plants in clusters, faithfully returning to the same resting spot every night. It sleeps so soundly that it is possible to pick it off its perch and return it later to the same location, without waking the rest of the colony.

Nectar and pollen are the food source for the Zebra Longwing butterfly. They are one of only a few types of butterflies known to feed on pollen, which is probably why they have such a long lifespan. They can live up to six months. If deprived of pollen, their lifespan decreases to the typical lifespan of a butterfly, which is about one month.

The larva or caterpillar of the Zebra Longwing is white with long black spines and a pale yellow head. It emerges from small yellow, cone-shaped eggs that are laid in cluster on the new growth of the larva plant. When the caterpillar pupates, it forms a chrysalis that looks like a spiny curled, dried leaf. Under optimum environmental conditions, the entire lifecycle of the Zebra Longwing, from egg to adult butterfly takes approximately three weeks.

When planning a butterfly garden, you must supply nectar plants for the adult butterflies and larva plants for the caterpillars to feed on. By attracting the adult butterflies to feed in your landscape, and providing them with a place to lay their eggs and feed their larvae, you can establish a permanent breeding place for the Zebra Longwings.

Zebra Longwing butterflies are especially fond of nectar from the flowers of lantana (*Lantana camara*), Spanish needle (*Bidens polisa*), and verbena (*Verbena* spp.). These plants are required in your landscape to attract the adult Zebra Longwings. You will also need to provide plants for the larvae to feed on. The larva plants will also serve as the site where the adult butterfly lays her eggs. The Zebra Longwing larvae feed primarily on passion vines that grow in part shade (*Passiflora lutea*, *Passiflora suberosa*). The Zebra Longwing will not lay their eggs on passion vines that are planted in sunny locations. In the sun, the passion vine will attract another butterfly called the Gulf Fritillary.

If you plant the nectar and the larvae plants in a shady spot of your landscape, you will attract the Zebra Longwing. There are also many other butterflies in Florida that you can attract to your landscape, if you do not have a shady landscape for the Zebra Longwings. Over one hundred butterfly species can be found in Florida, so keep an eye out for them. Each species of butterfly will be attracted to different kinds of plants. Know what plants the butterfly you are trying to attract likes, add them in your landscape, and you will be successful in drawing the butterflies to your garden.