

# NEWSLETTER

*VillageWalk Garden Club*  
of Bonita Springs

## BUTTERFLY FESTIVAL 2026



The Butterfly Festival was another great success this year thanks to Linda Blaise and Terri Freiheit who organized the event, the many volunteers from the Garden Club and VillageWalk who helped, and the sponsors who donated generously. While the Festival is a fund-raising activity for the Butterfly Gardens, it is also a community service to educate the public, promote the beauty and importance of the Butterfly Gardens, and provide a family-oriented activity. We will let the following photos tell the story of the fun that was enjoyed by all.



## Special Thanks to all our sponsors!

- Paradise Coast Property Team
- John R. Wood Properties
- Orchid Realty Group
- Berkshire Hathaway Home Service
- Insurance Specialists of SW Florida
- Local Real Estate
- Lee County Sheriff's

This newsletter is by the VillageWalk Garden Club of Bonita Springs Communications Committee:  
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# BUTTERFLY FESTIVAL 2026 CONTINUED



## BONITA SPRINGS HISTORICAL TOUR



In March, an enthusiastic group from the Club went on a guided tour of historic downtown Bonita Springs which is also known as “Old Bonita”. Geoff Trager, a volunteer from the [Bonita Springs Historical Society](#), led the tour. The group heard the story of Bonita Springs and viewed several often-overlooked landmarks.

Below are some [interesting facts about our community](#) that we learned from Geoff, our tour guide, and from other sources.

- There is archeological evidence that Native Americans lived in the area as far back as 8000 years ago. The [Calusa Indians](#) built shell mounds here 4000 years ago. The mounds that contained Native American artifacts were once common in the area, but builders unfortunately used the shell mound material for road fill.
- The original name of the town was named Survey, and the Imperial River was called Surveyors Creek after the U.S. Army surveyors who were mapping the region.
- Land developers changed the town’s name to Bonita Springs to make it sound more appealing. Bonita means “pretty” in Spanish.
- The historic spring for which the town is named after is thought to be on the property of the [Shangri-La Springs Hotel](#).
- The streets in downtown Bonita were given states names like Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Vermont as a marketing strategy to attract people from other states.
- When Tamiami Trail was first completed, traffic passed through downtown Bonita Springs, and it was a bustling motorists’ stopover. The [Wonder Gardens](#) and Shangri-La Springs Hotels are reminders of that time. In the 1970s, [41 was realigned and widened](#), resulting in the majority of the traffic bypassing downtown and [Old 41](#) was born.
- According to a [historical placard](#), pioneer Cordell Smith found a [banyan tree](#) sapling at the intersection of Bonita Beach Road and Heitmann Avenue. He carried the sizeable sapling on his back and planted it in downtown Survey on Old 41 near the current Public Library. After more than a century, it stands as one of the largest banyan trees in the U.S. Currently [Banyan Tree Square](#) is being totally transformed into a more enjoyable outdoor public space while maintaining the banyan tree as a focal point in the park. Check out the video rendition of the renovation at the [Wright Construction website](#). The targeted completion date is September 2026.





## PUBLIC ART IN BONITA SPRINGS - THE SECRET BENCH OF KNOWLEDGE

Did you know that the city’s [Art in Public Spaces](#) board has worked to develop an [outdoor art collection](#) in and around “Old Bonita”. We saw a few pieces of outdoor public art like sculptures and murals during our historical tour including ”The Secret Bench of Knowledge” sculpture at Old 41 and Childers Street near the large banyan tree. Czech Canadian sculptor Lea Vivot created it. This sculpture can also be seen at other locations around the world, but each one is unique because of different inscriptions from poets and writers. Here is a poem on the Bonita Springs sculpture. Visit downtown to see other thoughtful writings on The Secret Bench of Knowledge.

**I am a tiny dot in the universe  
 As all of us ARE  
 I sometimes wish I were more important  
 As all of us do.  
 I then realize I have my own importance  
 As all of us have.**

*by Sapi Cooper*



## MARCH GARDEN CLUB MEETING PRESENTATION – “FLORIDA-FRIENDLY GARDENING AND NATIVE PLANTS” HOW DOES THIS FIT INTO YOUR HOA?

In our February meeting, Connie Nagele from [The Friends of Collier County Butterflies](#) and the [Florida Native Plant Society](#) spoke about Butterfly Counts. In our March meeting, she delivered a presentation about a related topic, Florida Friendly Gardening and Native Plants, with a focus on gardens designed to attract butterflies. The habitats that are created for butterflies also support other wildlife like birds, bees, and other insects. In addition to experiencing and enjoying wildlife, we benefit from the beauty of the gardens.

Habitats are spaces that meet an organism’s needs for food, shelter, and reproduction. These spaces can be small, and appropriate plant choices should be made. For butterflies, suitable nectar plants (food source) and host plants (reproduction) are required. As we noted in the February 2026 newsletter, not all flowering plants are good nectar sources, and butterflies have preferences for certain nectar plants. Butterflies co-evolved over thousands of years with specific host plants that serve as places for butterflies to lay their eggs and for the caterpillars that hatch from the eggs to feed. From the March 2026 newsletter, the only host plant for the [Atala butterfly is Coontie](#) (*Zamia integrifolia*). Without Coontie, there would be no Atala butterflies.

Connie promoted native plants as favorite choices for wildlife habitat gardens. They are best suited to Florida’s climate (i.e. dry season – little to no rain, wet season - hot and humid, storms) and soil conditions (generally poor and sandy). They are more drought-tolerant, which is important during the dry conditions like we are currently experiencing. Here is a list of native plants nurseries from the February 2026 newsletter and Connie.

- [All Native Garden Center](#), Ft. Myers
- [Natives of Corkscrew](#), Buckingham
- [Sweet Bay Nursery](#), Parrish
- [SCCF Native Landscapes and Garden Center](#), Sanibel

Some of these nurseries are a long drive, so it is best to call ahead to find out what plants are available.

Having all native plants is not necessary when creating a wildlife habitat. The University of Florida/IFAS developed [Florida-Friendly Landscaping™ Principles](#) that includes best practices and lists native plants in addition to non-native plants like [pentas](#) (nectar plants) that can be used together. A [phone app](#) from UF/IFAS, has photos and details on over 400 Florida-Friendly plants. Also, the Florida Native Plant Society maintains a [plant database](#). The acceptable plant list for our HOA is not comprehensive, and other plants that are not listed still might be acceptable. With sufficient knowledge, homeowners can gain HOA approval of suitability of non-listed plants for their home garden.

According to Connie, there are key elements for creating a wildlife habitat in your home garden.

- Defined edges (hardscapes or mulched)
- Layered plant heights
- Host plants
- Year-round nectar sources

Connie presented examples of landscape designs for wildlife habitats, and photos are shown below.

- Figure 1: Habitat Island in a Planter Bed: [red salvia](#) (nectar, native), [white scorpionstail](#) (nectar, native), [coontie](#) (host), [yellow Senna mexicana](#) (host + nectar, native)
- Figure 2: Habitat in a Container: [passionvine](#) (host, native, on trellis), [blue-eyed grass](#) (nectar, native)
- Figure 3: Habitat in a Container with Florida-Friendly Plants and Natives: [pink pentas](#) (nectar, non-native), [yellow Senna mexicana](#) (nectar + host, native), [ivy](#) (non-native), [blue creeping sage](#) (nectar, native)
- Figure 4: Habitat in a Window Box: [red salvia](#) (nectar), [white Bidens alba](#) (nectar, native), [yellow West Coast dune sunflowers](#) (nectar, native)

## MARCH GARDEN CLUB MEETING PRESENTATION – “FLORIDA-FRIENDLY GARDENING AND NATIVE PLANTS” HOW DOES THIS FIT INTO YOUR HOA? CONTINUED

Some other favorite choices are [Texas sage](#), [blue-eyed grass](#), and [oblongleaf twin flower](#). In a sun/part shade landscape, [wild coffee](#) can be used as a background plant, and [blue porterweed](#) can serve as a ground cover.

Connie emphasized that Florida-Friendly gardening does not mean “no maintenance”. Some tips that she gave included the following list:

- Add organic material to amend the naturally occurring poor soil in Florida and use perlite and sand for drainage.
- Space plants with adequate room to grow so that they are not overcrowded.
- Test dampness first then water as needed. Avoid overwatering.
- Remove pests manually when possible. Insecticides and pesticides harm wildlife.
- Avoid overpruning. Some pruning of native plants can be done, but they prefer to take on their natural shapes like they do in wild landscapes.
- Deadhead blossoms for increased flowering.

During her talks to our Garden Club, Connie showed us that she is a devoted supporter and proponent of Florida wildlife and Florida-Friendly gardening that incorporates native plants with acceptable non-native plants. We look forward to having her lead the annual butterfly count in the VillageWalk Butterfly Gardens later this year.



Figure 1: Habitat Island in a Planter Bed



Figure 2: Habitat in a Container Using a Trellis



Figure 3: Habitat in a Container with Florida-Friendly plants and Natives

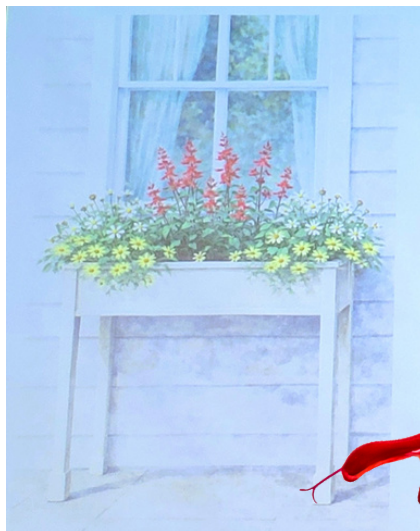


Figure 4: Habitat in a Window Box



## THANK YOU AND BEST WISHES

Several highly active members of the VillageWalk Garden Club will be leaving VillageWalk. Thanks to all of them for their contributions to the Garden Club, Butterfly Gardens and the VillageWalk Community.

- Paula and Paul Kuk: Gardeners in Butterfly Garden 6, Butterfly Festival volunteers
- Candy Minnick: Head gardener in Butterfly Garden 2, Butterfly Festival volunteer, Holiday Party and Membership & Greeters Committees member
- Marlene Stalker: Gardener in Butterfly Garden 2
- Linda Musick: Gardener in Butterfly Garden 4, Chair of the Trips and Tours Committee, Hospitality Committee member
- Dolores Damiano-Szafran: Past President, Chair of the Sustainability Committee, gardener in Butterfly Garden 5, Fundraising Committee member, Plant & Bake Sale and Butterfly Festival volunteer

We wish them all the best in the future. Instead of saying “Goodbye” to all these wonderful people, let’s use the Hawaiian farewell phrase [“A hui hou kākou”](#) which translates to “until we meet again”.



Candy Musick (center) and Marlene Stalker (right) with Terri Galloway



Dolores Damiano-Szafran

*We will miss you*



Linda Musick (left) with Barbara Salatto and Barb McGuire



Paula (center) and Paul Kuk (right) with Linda Greendyke

## LITTORAL PLANTINGS IN VILLAGEWALK



**Yellow Canna** (*Canna flaccida*)

The water levels in our ponds are quite low because of the ongoing drought. As a result, the plantings in the [littoral](#) areas are struggling a bit. Even with the dry conditions, some plants like Yellow Canna (*Canna flaccida*), Duck Potato/Broadleaf Arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*), and Pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*) are adding beauty to our community. Soon the rainy season will be here, and the littoral plants will be happier!



**Pickerelweed** (*Pontederia cordata*)



**Duck Potato/Broadleaf Arrowhead** (*Sagittaria latifolia*)

## TRIPS & TOURS



TRIPS/TOUR	DATE	SCHEDULE	COST
<a href="#">Naples Botanical Garden</a> – Guided Orchid Experience	April 16, 2026	1) Carpool from Bocce Parking Lot: 9:00 a.m. 2) Tour: 10:00 a.m. (90 min.)	<b>Members: \$55</b> <b>Non-Members: \$75</b> (min 10 and max 20 people)



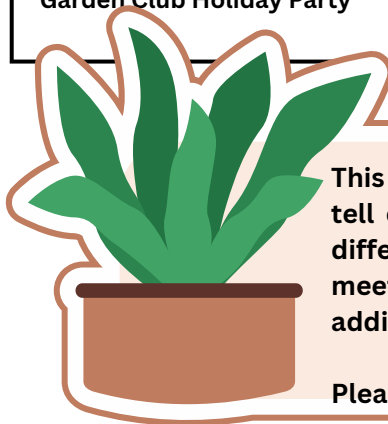
More details on the above Trips/Tours are available at the Garden Club meetings and in upcoming email announcements. Signing up for the Trip/Tour can be done at the monthly Garden Club meetings or by getting in touch with the Trips and Tours Committee (Eileen Rowell & Rita Pignato, Co-Chairs; Jackie Fegan, Gail Brinley, and Leslie Bischoff). Please direct your questions to them.

# IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE 2025-2026 SEASON



**\*Note that all the Garden Club meetings are on Tuesdays except the one on April 23 which is on a Thursday.**

MEETING/EVENT	DATE	TIME	LOCATION
Garden Club Meeting*	Apr. 23, 2026	1:00 - 2:30 PM	Town Center
Garden Club Meeting and Plant Exchange	May 19, 2026	1:00 - 2:30 PM	Town Center
Garden Club Holiday Party	Thursday, Dec. 3	TBD	Town Center



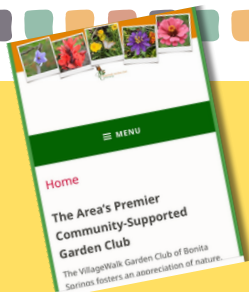
**Last Garden Club Meeting for 2025-2026 Season!  
May 19 Garden Club Meeting and Plant Exchange**

This meeting will be our annual Plant Exchange where you bring a plant, tell our club a little bit about it and how to care for it, then choose a different plant to take home for your garden. This is a very informative meeting where you can learn about other new and exciting plants while adding to your horticultural collection!

Please use SignUp Genius if you plan to attend.

## Area Events

AREA EVENTS	DATE	LOCATION
<a href="#">Grow Ft. Myers &amp; Orchid Symposium</a> (Free)	April 11-12, 2026	Edison and Ford Winter Estates (Ft. Myers)
<a href="#">CREW Spring Butterfly Count</a> (Free)	April 15, 2026	Flint Pen Strand (Bonita Springs)
<a href="#">This</a>	April 18, 2026	Conservancy of Southwest Florida (Naples)



**CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE!**

[www.villagewalkgardenclub.com](http://www.villagewalkgardenclub.com)

Our website is full of information about the garden club, events and sustainability practices.

