

ZEBRA LONGWING - ONE CATERPILLAR NOT TO CONTROL

Our landscapes provide many opportunities to deal with challenging insects that eat our plants. Caterpillars are one category of potential chewing pests that we commonly encounter amongst the foliage and flowers. Imagine the world of caterpillars including snowbush spanworms, oleander caterpillars, corn earworms, cutworms and corn borers – all not very fun to deal with! But for every caterpillar, there is either a potential beautiful butterfly or moth that follows. One such butterfly that I really enjoy seeing in my yard is the zebra longwing. Designated as the state butterfly in 1996, there is nothing that can match its graceful and elegant appearance as it drifts seemingly carefree through your yard. Simply beautiful in design, this is one butterfly and caterpillar that you don't want to control!

Found not only in Florida, but also Mexico, Central and South America as well as the West Indies, the zebra longwing is relatively common in our area at any time of year. While not a really big butterfly, the zebra longwing looks like no other Florida butterfly. The upper appearance of the wings is black in color with striking yellow stripes. The lower portion looks similar, just paler and with some red dots

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close to the body. Adults feed on both nectar and pollen. The unique addition of pollen to their diet provides good nutrition to the adult butterfly which in turn prolongs its life to several months. Most butterflies only live two to four weeks. Another curious habit that adult zebra longwings sometimes practice is the formation of small groups that come together to roost overnight.

The caterpillars of this butterfly are equally interesting with a white body and black spots. In addition, black branched spines adorn the length of the caterpillar's body. Before the caterpillars are noticed, eggs are deposited and can be seen

with the naked eye. If you look carefully, you may also be able to spot the small yellow eggs on the newest growth of the zebra longwing's host plants.

In order to attract and support zebra longwings, you will want to add several members of the passionflower family to your butterfly garden as host food. Plants to consider include the purple passionflower, the corkystem passionflower, the yellow passionflower, and several others. Beautiful vining plants all by themselves, you can enjoy both the highly colorful passionflower flowers as well as the "flying flowers" they attract; zebra longwings.

Resources:

- Daniels, J.C. (2009) Zebra Longwing, *Heliconius charitonia* (Linnaeus). UF/IFAS Extension Service.

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For more information about our Florida Yards and Neighborhoods Program, please contact our FYN Horticulture Program Assistant, Allison Turner, at 764.4351 or email Allison.Turner@CharlotteFL.com. Allison can help educate you about the FYN Program so you can create a beautiful, Florida-Friendly landscape that saves you time and money while conserving precious water resources and reducing pollution.

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