

Clip 'n' Save – Buddleia

Buddleia davidii: Commonly called “Butterfly Bushes,” Buddleia attract butterflies, hummingbirds and beneficial pollinators in droves. Buddleia are generally large, dense bushes featuring big, majestic flower spikes that bloom in intense hues of pink, orange, red, lilac and purple throughout the summer. Representing over 100 flowering species native to Asia, Africa and the Americas, its name pays homage to the Reverend Alan Buddle, a 17th century English botanist and rector. The genus – correctly spelled Buddleja – is a member of the Scrophulariaceae or figwort family.

Size: Most nursery-stock Buddleia qualify as shrubs and are fast growers reaching a size of 5-7 feet or more, often in their first season with equally spreading width. I have several mature specimens in my yard that have reached heights of over 10 feet so placement is important. Consider planting as borders, to add interest and color where you might traditionally think “tree” and alongside porch steps and deck railings to soften architectural lines. Many spectacular examples can be found along fence lines on foothill ranches throughout the Motherlode. If allowed to grow into trees, Buddleia will develop sturdy trunks that peel but don't be alarmed – peeling is perfectly normal. Several compact cultivars have also recently been developed that can be kept healthily pruned to a manageable 3-4 feet for smaller garden areas.

Exposure: Full sun

Soil: Fertile but well-draining soil

Planting: Plant in spring or fall. Space 5-10 feet between other plants to allow for future growth. Dig a hole twice the diameter of the plant container, loosen the soil and mix in some compost keeping in mind that good drainage is key. Place plant so that the top of the root ball is level with the soil surface, cover and water thoroughly.

Water needs: Water regularly; Buddleia prefer well drained soil but not “bone dry.”

Fertilizing: Avoid fertilizing; too much fertilizer will support leaf growth over flower development.

Pruning: Buddleia bloom on new wood. Prune severely to encourage flower production and stimulate new growth as plants can get leggy. Regular deadheading of spent flowers will also produce blooms all summer long.

Pests: Susceptible to caterpillars and spider mites.

Snapshot: Buddleia went out of vogue for a time because of their tendency to reseed and invade places where they weren't wanted. In our foothills Mediterranean climate where rainfall is limited to certain months of the year, it's not such a problem keeping this garden beauty under control. There are even new seedless varieties with the common names Summer Lilac, Nectar Bush and Seedless Butterfly Bush. Today, Buddleia is back in a big way for all those reasons that made it the darling of Victorian gardens all those centuries ago – a fast growing plant with fragrant summer flowers, one that requires minimal care and feeds and attracts butterflies and

hummingbirds. And you can feel good knowing you're doing your part in helping to maintain a food supply so vital to our native bees and other pollinators.

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