

## Butterfly Diner

*By Ashley Gonzalez*

Anna loved butterflies. She loved the way they floated, the way they twirled through the air like tiny bits of sunshine.

But lately, she hardly saw any at all.

One warm afternoon, Anna asked her mom,

"Mommy, where did all the butterflies go?"

Her mom sighed.

"Well, sweetheart, many of their homes are disappearing and the flowers they need to eat from are harder to find."

That night, Anna had an idea. If butterflies couldn't find a place to eat, then she'd make them one!

The next morning, she grabbed her notebook.

She made a list:

Native flowers – check

Safe water – check

Sunny spot – check

She even wrote a big sign at the top:

Butterfly Diner – OPEN SOON!

Anna and her mom went to their local nursery; Magnolia's.

There, they filled their cart with:

Scarlet milkweed for monarchs, Firebush for swallowtails, Purple porterweed for gulf fritillaries, and Blanketflower for painted ladies.

"All the best nectar snacks," Anna said.

Back home, Anna dug in the sandy soil until her knees were brown and her hair was messy. She planted every flower like she was setting a table—a table just for butterflies.

Days passed.

The sunshine warmed the ground. Afternoon showers sprinkled the leaves. And then...

one morning, Anna saw a flash of orange.

A monarch butterfly!

It sipped from the scarlet milkweed, its wings opening and closing like a slow heartbeat. She grinned.

“The Butterfly Diner is open for business!”

Soon, more guests arrived—  
a zebra longwing, a cloudless sulphur, and a gulf fritillary with silver spots like tiny mirrors. The diner was bustling.

Anna’s next door neighbor, Mrs. Warner, peeked over the fence.

“What’s all the flutter?” she asked.

“It’s my Butterfly Diner,” she explained.

“They’re endangered here in Florida, so I planted native flowers to give them food and a safe place to visit.”

Mrs. Warner thought for a moment.

“Maybe I could make one, too.”

The next week, Anna saw her planting firebush and blanketflower in her yard.

Mrs. Hernandez across the street joined in. Then her other next door neighbors; the Parkers.

Soon, yards all over the block were filled with blossoms and gentle wings.

By the end of summer, the whole neighborhood buzzed with life—bees, birds, and butterflies dancing together.

It was like one giant Butterfly Diner.

Anna watched a zebra longwing land on her finger. Its wings brushed her skin, light as a secret.

“Come back anytime,” she whispered. “There will always be a table for you.”

THE END

## Florida's Fluttering Treasures:

Did you know that Florida is home to over 200 species of butterflies — that's more than any other state east of the Mississippi River! That means there's always something fluttering nearby if you know where to look!

But many of these colorful pollinators, like the Miami Blue and the Schaus' Swallowtail, are in trouble.

### Why Are Butterflies Disappearing?

Butterflies need special plants and safe homes to survive. But their numbers are dropping because of losing their favorite homes due to:

- Too many buildings and roads.
- Sprays that hurt caterpillars.
- Fewer native plants to eat and lay eggs on
- Stronger storms and rising seas
- Invasive species

But good news—you can help!

### How You Can Help:

Be a butterfly hero. Even small actions make a big difference!

### Start your own butterfly diner:

- Plant native flowers – Choose Florida plants like:
  - Milkweed (for Monarchs)
  - Passionflower vine (for Zebra Longwings)
  - Coontie (for Atalas)
  - Firebush, Lantana, Coreopsis, and Blanket Flower (for nectar)

Every flower you plant is like setting a tiny table at your very own Butterfly Diner!

Build a butterfly garden – Include both host plants (for caterpillars) and nectar plants (for adults).  
skip pesticides – Let your garden stay naturally wild!

Provide water – A small, shallow dish with pebbles makes a perfect butterfly “café.”

Inspire others – Like the neighbors in Butterfly Diner, share your garden ideas with your community!

Remember, even small gardens can make a big difference. So, let's make the butterflies feel at home and together, we can keep Florida's skies full of color.