

The Bordered Patch Butterfly in the Garden



I planted Sun Chocks (Jerusalem Artichokes) in the garden a few years ago, thinking they would be an easily grown addition to our diet. The “easily grown” part worked out fine, but we never successfully adopted the gaseous little fellows into our diet. Nevertheless, one cluster of them remained in the front yard for no good reason until a wandering female discovered them one year. Now the Sun Chocks serve the purpose of maintaining this delightful butterfly colony.

The Bordered Patch butterfly (*Chlosyne lacinia, subspecies*) ranges from northern New Mexico south to Argentina, east to about Huston TX and west across the desert regions to California. In south Texas, it is on the wing year round, but in southern New Mexico, it flies from March through October. The Patch Butterfly is likely the most variable butterfly in our area with endless polymorphisms of wing color and pattern. Populations in southern New Mexico are integrades between two defined subspecies – one to the west and one to the east and south. So don't expect all the individuals you see to look exactly like each other or like these photographs. Males and females are similar, except that females are slightly larger.

Females deposit their eggs on the undersides of leaves in clusters of about 140. The first three larval instars remain together feeding communally and causing considerable damage to the plants. The larvae clusters may even make loose tent structures for protection. Older larvae are solitary. Overwintering occurs in the third larval instar (pictured) and the larvae may become dormant during hot dry spells.

The larvae feed on many members of the Sunflower family, but have a definite preference for Sun Chocks in my garden. Adults nectar feed on most flowers, but show a preference for yellow and white ones if they are available.

So if you want to add this beautiful little butterfly to your garden, plant some Sun Chocks and give me a call next summer for a “seeding” of young larvae, or wait for a wandering female to find you.

Good gardening and good eating,

Darrol Shillingburg
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