

BUTTERFLY GARDENING

Butterfly gardening involves planning your garden to attract, retain and encourage butterfly populations. Butterflies are looking for two things when they enter a garden: nectar, the food that adult butterflies need, and host plants, the place where the female will lay her eggs and the food caterpillars need. Both are necessary to create a successful butterfly garden.

Nectar Plants. Nectar plants are plants that produce the sweet fluid that many insects, including butterflies, use as food. Butterflies appear to be attracted to areas with large masses of a single color, or closely related colors, rather than gardens with many colors mixed together. This does not mean you have to use one color of flower; just mass your flowers together in large groupings. Most butterflies must land in order to get the nectar. They prefer plants having either clusters of short tubular flowers, like Lantana, or flowers with large, flat petals, like Coneflowers. Butterflies are active from early spring through frost, and having a mix of plants in your garden that bloom the entire time will attract them all season long.

Host Plants. Because tiny caterpillars cannot travel far to find food, the female butterfly only lays her eggs on the types of plants the caterpillars will eat. Most species of caterpillars are particular about the type of plants they eat. Many native trees and other plants found in and around our yards are host plants for caterpillars. However, there is a large variety of plants that can be included in a garden that are excellent hosts. Many gardeners can't stand to see plants that have been chewed on. Don't worry about it! If you do not provide host plants, you will have fewer butterflies.

Location and Design. Both butterflies and the plants they prefer, like bright sunny areas protected from high winds. Look for areas around your yard that have at least six hours of sun, morning to mid-afternoon seems to work best. If your yard is not too large, you can also plant separate areas throughout the landscape. Add some containers to your deck or patio, too.

Extra Touches. Add a few flat rocks to your garden. On cool mornings, butterflies need to warm their bodies before they become active. To do this they will sit on a reflective surface, like a flat rock, and spread their wings to absorb the sun's warmth.

Make a "puddling" place. Butterflies often gather in groups on wet sand or mud, and they look like they are eating. They are. This activity is called puddling. You can create this in your garden by placing a shallow pan in the soil, filling it with coarse sand and keeping it moist. You can add salt at a rate of one-half cup to one gallon of sand, mix well, and moisten.

Don't forget water. Butterflies need a drink, too. You can use an old saucer filled with pebbles. Just make sure some of the pebbles are above the water level so they have a place to land.



Butterflies and Caterpillars are insects. The use of insecticides will kill butterflies and caterpillars. If a pest problem develops in your butterfly garden, try using biological controls, such as some ladybugs or praying mantis as a first line of defense. These are often already present. If pests such as aphids, whiteflies, mealybugs, or spider mites become a problem, try using insecticidal soap or horticultural oil applied only to areas of the plant where the pests are located. Do not use widespread applications.

Yes, you will have bees, too! You can't have one without the other, but don't worry. Unless you coat yourself with honey, they really don't care about you. They have a job to do pollinating all the flowers. If you leave them alone, they will leave you alone.

Residential and commercial development is destroying natural wildlife habitats. By choosing certain plants for adult and larval feeding, we encourage the establishment of butterfly populations which return year after year. As you manage your garden, your efforts will assure the presence of butterflies and the sharing of your personal backyard Eden with these beautiful, soaring insects. Have fun experimenting with different plants! Here's some to try:

Nectar Plants

Annuals— Ageratum, Alyssum, Bidens, Calendula, Cosmos, Gomphrena, Heliotrope, Impatiens, Lantana, Marigolds, Nasturtium, Nicotiana, Penta, Petunia, Queen Anne's Lace, Sunflower, Tithonia, Verbena, Zinna

Perennials— Achillea, Agastache, Alcea, Amorpha, Arabis, Asclepias, Aster, Baptisia, Boltonia, Buddleja, Caryopteris, Centaurea, Centranthus, Ceratostigma, Chelone, Chrysanthemum, Coreopsis, Daucus, Dianthus, Digitalis, Echinacea, Echinops, Erigeron, Eupatorium, Gaillardia, Gaura, Helianthus, Heliopsis, Hemerocallis, Hesperis, Heuchera, Hibiscus, Iberis, Knautia, Lavandula, Leucanthemum, Liatris, Lupinus, Lychnis, Malva, Monarda, Nepeta, Oenothera, Paeonia, Perovskia, Phlox, Physostegia, Rudbeckia, Salvia, Saponaria, Scabiosa, Sedum, Solidago, Stokesia, Tanacetum, Verbena, Veronica

Herbs— Anise, Basil, Chives, Hyssop, Lavender, Marjoram, Mints, Oregano, Rosemary, Sage, Thyme

Trees and Shrubs— Abelia, Blueberry, Clethra, Itea, Lilac, Magnolia, Mockorange, Pear, Peach, Plum, Redbud, Rose, Rose of Sharon, Spirea, Viburnum, Weigelia

Host Plants

Perennials—Alcea, Arabis, Asclepias, Aster, Carex, Ceratostigma, Daucus, Dianthus, Heliopsis, Lupinus, Malva, Rudbeckia, Sedum

Herbs—Anise, Dill, Fennel, Lovage, Parsley

Trees and Shrubs—Ash, Aspen, Birch, Chokecherry, Cottonwood, Elm, Hawthorn, Oak, Paw Paw, Willow



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