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Attracting butterflies

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Nectar Plants

When choosing nectar plants for your butterfly garden, be sure to include a variety of plants with bloom times occurring throughout the year. Include a lot of color in your garden. Butterflies are attracted to reds, yellows, pinks, oranges and purples.

Lantana (Lantana camara)
   Fritillary, Skipper, Swallowtail

Aster (Aster spp.)
   Painted Lady, Swallowtail, Viceroy

Pineapple Sage (Salvia elegans)
   Sulphur

Butterfly Bush (Buddleja davidii)
   Swallowtail, Monarch

Butterfly Weed (Asclepias tuberosa)
   Swallowtail, Sulphur, Hairstreak

Joe-pye Weed (Eupatorium purpureum)
   Swallowtail
   Fritillary

Cherry (Prunus spp.)
   Tiger Swallowtail, Viceory
   Red-spotted Purple

Hawthorn (Crataegus spp.)
   Hairstreak

Willow (Salix spp.)
   Tiger Swallowtail, Red-spotted Purple
   Fritillary

Yellow Poplar (Liriodendron tulipifera)
   Mourning Cloak, Viceroy, Red Admiral

Elm (Ulmus spp.)
   Mourning Cloak, Question Mark

Other “Must-Haves” for Your Butterfly Garden

Oak (Quercus spp.)
Abelia (Abelia spp.)
Clover (Trifolium spp.)
Queen Anne’s Lace (Daucus carota)
Daylily (Hemerocallis spp.)
Phlox (Phlox spp.)
Mexican Bush Sage (Salvia leucantha)
Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis)
Mint (Mentha spp.)
Coreopsis (Coreopsis spp.)
Goldenrod (Solidago spp.)
Sunflowers (Helianthus spp.)
Verbena (Verbena spp.)
Lavender (Lavandula spp.)
Purple Coneflower (Echinacea purpurea)
Black-eyed Susan (Rudbeckia hirta)
Shasta Daisy (Chrysanthenum maximum)
Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)
Angels’ Trumpet (Brugmansia spp.)
Gayfeather (Liatris spicata)
Ironweed (Vernonia galamensis)

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About Butterflies

Butterflies are amazing life forms and have long been appreciated for their beauty. Today, they are also appreciated for their importance to ecosystems. Because they are sensitive to pesticides and other toxins, their presence, diversity and abundance indicate the well-being of an ecosystem. Not only do butterflies add beauty to the landscape, they also pollinate plants and provide a food source for predators, such as birds.

There are over 700 species of butterflies in North America. A butterfly’s life cycle can range from one month to one year, depending on the species.

Butterflies have a unique partnership with plants. As larvae, they feed on plants, and as adults, they pollinate plants while drinking nectar. Many butterflies have specific plants that they depend on for all stages of life. For example, Monarch butterflies will only lay their eggs on milkweed.

Host Plants

Without host plants for laying eggs, eating, forming chrysalises and protection, the nectar plants won’t get much attention.

- Copper Fennel (Foeniculum vulgare) • **SWALLOWTAIL**
- Spicebush (Lindera benzoin) • **SWALLOWTAIL**
- Parsley (Petroselinum crispum) • **SWALLOWTAIL**
- Butterfly Weed (Asclepias tuberosa) • **MONARCH**
- Snapdragon (Antirrhinum spp.) • **BUCKEYE**
- Aster (Aster spp.) • **SEVERAL SPECIES**
- Dill (Anethum graveolens) • **SWALLOWTAIL**
- Black Cherry (Prunus serotina) • **SWALLOWTAIL • RED-SPOTTED PURPLE**
- Passion Vine (Passiflora spp.) • **ZEbra LONGWING • Fritillary**
- Tulip Poplar (Liriodendron tulipifera) • **SWALLOWTAIL**
- Paw Paw (Asimina triloba) • **SWALLOWTAIL**
- Dogwood (Cornus florida) • **SPRING AZURE**

Planning Your Butterfly Garden

A butterfly garden not only creates a beautiful botanical area, but also attracts other pollinators and wildlife. To make a butterfly garden, first choose a sunny area and fill it with nectar-rich plants. Since butterflies need to be shielded from wind, plant shrubs along the perimeter of your butterfly garden to help reduce wind. Butterflies also need protection from predators as well as places to perch, so add a few trees to the area or just leave ones already present. Evergreen trees provide protection from storms year round.

Several species of butterflies prefer drinking juice from decaying fruit rather than flower nectar. Planting natives that drop fruit, such as persimmons, crabapples and grapes, will invite butterflies such as Red Admirals and Viceroy. Another way to attract these butterflies is to set out a plate of kitchen scraps or over-ripened fruit. Use irrigation systems to water your garden if possible; sprinklers and hoses dilute nectar supplies and are a less efficient use of water.

Butterflies spend the cool morning hours warming themselves in sunny spots. Place a few decorative rocks around your garden and make sure you have plenty of sun-bathing spots. Butterflies drink at puddle margins and moist areas to obtain salts and amino acids. To make a butterfly puddle, fill a shallow dish with sand and leave a 1” margin around the top. Place small rocks along the edges of your “puddle” to give the butterflies a place to land. Be sure to keep your butterfly puddle moist.

Life Cycle of a Butterfly

Butterflies have four stages of life. Adult females lay eggs that have been fertilized by adult males on host plants. The egg then hatches into the larval form - a tiny caterpillar. Caterpillars eat, eat again, and then eat some more. Their job is to grow! From hatching to pupating, a caterpillar may increase its body size 30,000 times. The caterpillar then encloses itself into a chrysalis. Inside the chrysalis, the caterpillar transforms into an adult butterfly through a process known as metamorphosis.