



Butterfly Gardening

“Plant what butterflies love and they will come”

Tips for Beginning a Butterfly Garden

Why plant a butterfly garden?

Just for the sheer joy of watching these beautiful creatures and the special joy of knowing that you have tempted them into your yard. The average gardener can make a real difference to preserve the local species by providing food and shelter, especially important because so many of our meadows and fields are being swallowed up through urban development.

Where should I locate a butterfly garden?

Choose a sunny location. Butterflies are cold blooded and need the sun to fly. Select an area that is protected by the wind. Trees, shrubbery and fences will provide this protection. It is also beneficial to have some rocks around to provide additional warmth on cool days.

What kind of plants should I grow?

There are two different kinds of plants you can grow for butterflies. Plants that the butterflies will feed upon – **nectar plants**; and plants they will lay their eggs on – **host plants**. Each butterfly species has evolved so that it can only feed on certain plants. Sometimes just one plant family will be a food source for the caterpillars. A female butterfly will seek out the correct plant to lay her eggs, and this is the plant that the hatched caterpillars will eat.

What are the favorite nectar plants for butterflies?

The most favored plants of the adult butterfly is the butterfly bush and after you see how many butterflies this plant attracts, you’ll want to have more than just one. There are many wildflowers and cultivated plants that attract butterflies, but you can start with the top 10 nectar producing plants; aster, black eyed susan, butterfly weed, coreopsis, joe-pye weed, lantana, liatris, pentas and purple coneflower.

Must I grow host plants in my garden?

If you are new to butterfly gardening, just enjoy the beauty and joy of attracting butterflies to your yard. If you have the space and want an active role in encouraging the life cycle process in your yard, then add a few of the host plants depending on the species that visit your yard. You’ll then be able to observe the cycle of egg-laying and the transformation from caterpillar to adult butterfly.

Won’t the caterpillars eat all of my prized plants?

Surprisingly, in most gardens, the caterpillars rarely do a great deal of damage to the plants. Any given butterfly



Black Swallowtail



Tiger Swallowtail



Clouded Sulphur



Painted Lady



Mourning Cloak



Monarch



Red Spotted Purple



Viceroy

species generally eats only one type of plant. Actually, caterpillars are a food source for a lot of other creatures, especially birds, and they will have the opportunity to eat the majority of caterpillars before they reach maturity.

A very important tip:

AVOID USING PESTICIDES WHEN POSSIBLE

They are deadly for pests as well as butterflies and caterpillars. If you have been using pesticides, it will take a little while for your garden to get back into balance. But in time, the praying mantis and ladybugs will get established and the birds and toads will have a natural insect buffet.

Top Ten Nectar Plants



Spicebush Butterfly

New England Aster – Perennial, 1-3 feet; blooms summer to fall; shades of pink, blue and purple

Black Eyed Susan – Perennial; 2-3 feet; blooms August and September; deep yellow flowers

Butterfly Bush – Perennial; 6 – 14 feet; blooms summer to early autumn; shades of purple, white, lavender, and pink

Butterfly Weed/Milkweed – Perennial; 30 inches; blooms June and July; shades of fiery red, orange and yellow

Coreopsis – Perennial; 18 inches to 2 feet; blooms in summer; shades of creamy yellow and bright yellow

Joe-Pye Weed – Perennial; 5-6 feet; blooms late summer to fall; wine red buds open into dusty lavender blossoms

Lantana – Annual – good choice for hanging baskets, planters and pots; 16 inches; blooms abundantly all summer in shades of pink, yellow and orange

Blazing Star/Gayfeather – Perennial; 18 inches to 3 feet; blooms July and August in shades of rose, blue and white with 12” flower spikes and grass-like foliage

Pentas – Annual; 10-16 inches; blooms all summer; red blooms that resemble the native butterfly plant

Purple Coneflower – Perennial; 3 feet; blooms July to September with magenta rose flowers

Host Plants of Common Butterflies
You can add to your garden



Spring Azure Caterpillar

- ***Milkweed*** attracts the **Monarch**
- ***Dill and parsley*** attracts the **Black Swallowtail**
- ***Marigolds*** attract **Sulphurs**
- ***Birch and cherry trees*** attracts **Tiger Swallowtails**
- ***Thistles and borage*** attracts the **Painted Lady**
- ***Willow trees*** attract the **Mourning Cloak** and **Viceroy**
- ***Tulip Poplar trees*** attract the **Red Spotted Purple**
- The ***Spice bush*** attracts the **Spicebush butterfly**
- ***Dogwood trees and the Viburnum bush*** attracts **Spring Azures**



Written by Linda Buchanan, Montgomery County Master Gardener Volunteer