

## Butterfly Gardens

Butterflies depend on plants in many ways. The most successful butterfly gardens include plants which meet the needs of butterflies during all four stages of their life cycle: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, and adult.

After mating, female butterflies search for a specific kind of "host plant" to lay her eggs on. Some butterflies lay eggs on more than one type of plant while others only use one particular kind of host plant.

In a few days caterpillars emerge from the eggs and begin to eat. Caterpillars are selective eaters and only feed on specific kinds of plants. If the desired plants aren't available, the caterpillars will starve rather than eat another type of plant. Usually female butterflies lay eggs on or near the plants their caterpillars prefer to eat. Most butterfly caterpillars feed on native plants and are not considered agricultural or ornamental pests.

In a few weeks when the caterpillars are fully grown, they shed their skin for the final time and change into chrysalises. Inside each chrysalis the body of an adult butterfly is formed. Often chrysalises are attached to plant stems and protected by surrounding vegetation.

After emerging from the chrysalis, the adult butterfly soon begins to search for nectar-rich flowers to feed.

Plants are important to butterflies during each stage of their life cycle. A garden designed with this in mind attracts the largest number and greatest variety of butterfly visitors.

Creating a butterfly garden is an exciting and rewarding endeavor! It is easy to invite butterflies to your area by gardening with their needs in mind. These beautiful insects will add bright colors and entertaining antics to your garden display. Use the following techniques to produce a delightful butterfly garden in your own backyard.

**Locate the garden in a sunny area.** Butterflies and most butterfly attracting plants require bright sunshine.

**Plant nectar producing flowers.** Butterflies visit flowers in search of nectar, a sugary fluid, to eat. Many native butterflies seem to prefer purple, yellow, orange, and red-colored blossoms. Clusters of short, tubular flowers or flat topped blossoms provide the ideal shapes for butterflies to easily land and feed.

**Select single flowers rather than double flowers.** The nectar of single flowers is more accessible and easier for butterflies to extract than the nectar of double flowers which have more petals per flower.

**Use large splashes of color in your landscape design.** Butterflies are first attracted to flowers by their color. Groups of flowers are easier for butterflies to locate than isolated plants.

**Plan for continuous bloom throughout the growing season.** Butterflies are active from early spring until late fall. Plant a selection of flowers that will provide nectar throughout the entire growing season (ie. Spring – azaleas, summer – buddleia, fall – chrysanthemums).

**Include host plants in the garden design.** Host plants provide food for caterpillars and lure female butterflies into the garden to lay eggs.

**Include damp areas or shallow puddles in the garden.** Summer butterflies drink and extract salts from moist soil. Occasionally large numbers of male butterflies congregate around a moist area to drink, forming a "puddle club".

**Place flat stones in the garden.** Butterflies often perch on stones, bare soil or vegetation, spread their wings and bask in the sun. Basking raises their body temperature so they are able to fly and remain active.

**Do not use pesticides in or near a butterfly garden.** Most traditional garden pesticides are toxic to butterflies. Use predatory insects, insecticidal soap or hand remove the pests if problems occur.

**Become a butterfly watcher!** Get to know the colorful butterflies that visit your garden. They are easy to identify with a field guide such as *Butterflies and Moths – A Golden Guide* by R. T. Mitchell and H. S. Zim.





## Plants for a Butterfly Garden

### Nectar Sources

Azalea  
Serviceberry  
Birch  
Hackberry  
Dogwood  
Hawthorne  
Cherry  
Oak  
Willow  
Linden  
Nannyberry Tree  
Butterfly Bush  
Flowering Quince  
Summersweet  
Variegated Dogwood  
Rose of Sharon

Privet  
Sand Cherry  
Fragrant Sumac  
Lilac  
Viburnum  
Weigela  
Dutchman's Pipe  
Honeysuckle  
Yarrow  
Geranium  
Gaillardia  
Perennial Sunflower  
Coralbells  
Ligularia  
Lysimachia  
Beardtongue  
Russian Sage

Obedient Plant  
Scabiosa  
Sedum  
Golden Rod  
Oregano  
Lantana  
Eupatorium  
New England Aster  
Globe Thistle  
Joe-Pye Weed  
Phlox  
Liatris  
Black-eyed Susan  
Bee Balm  
Catmint  
Coreopsis  
Lavender

Daisy  
Hollyhock  
Lupine  
Mallow  
Milkweed  
Purple Coneflower  
Thrift  
Verbena  
Cosmos  
Marigold  
Heliotrope  
Impatiens  
Mexican Sunflower  
Zinnia

### Host Plants

Butterfly weed  
Parsley  
Dill  
Copper Fennel  
Spicebush  
Tulip Tree

