



Building a Butterfly Garden

Butterfly Garden

Before beginning a butterfly garden project, it helps to understand what butterflies' needs at different life cycle stages. The cycle begins when adult butterflies lay eggs on a "host" plant. Some butterflies will only lay their eggs on a single type of plant (e.g, Monarchs and Milkweed), while others have several choices. In about five to ten days, the egg hatches and the tiny caterpillar eats the host plant, shedding its skin four to six times as it grows. After two to four weeks, the full grown larva or caterpillar attaches itself to a twig or other object and transforms into a pupa. The body changes during this inactive stage and ten to fifteen days later the adult butterfly emerges. This process, called metamorphosis, means "change of form."

Adult butterflies feed on nectar from flowers (and in doing so, inadvertently pollinate) while the larvae feed mostly on the foliage of plants. Ideally, a butterfly garden should contain or be located near a range of plants that will feed the butterfly at both stages.

Designing Your Garden

You need only a small bed to create an inviting oasis for butterflies. Consider using winter months to read, research, and learn about butterflies and the plants that will attract them in your area.

Both butterflies and plants like sun so plan your garden with a southern exposure or in a site that gets at least six hours of sun each day. A site sheltered from the wind by trees, shrubs, or a building, will prevent tall plants from blowing over, and allow your butterflies to feed, mate, and lay eggs in relative tranquility.

Nectar flowers provide a source of food for adult butterflies. Butterflies are attracted to brightly colored, sweet-smelling flowers that allow them easy access. (Composite daisy-like flowers are favorites.)

Host plants upon which butterfly larvae dine are often "weeds," wildflowers, shrubs, and trees native to the area. Some of the primary plants for butterfly larvae include many kinds, refer to the list of host plants on the next page. Although the caterpillars of some butterflies, like the cabbage white, are considered vegetable garden pests, you should never use pesticides, even biological ones, in a butterfly garden or you'll destroy your intended guests.

Puddles or other shallow water sources are important, primarily for male butterflies, to provide a source of salt and amino acids than as a water source. If you have no naturally occurring puddles, try sinking a shallow container filled with moist sand, dirt, and/or stones into the ground. Keep it moist and watch for large congregations of male butterflies and their drinking buddies.

Dark stones in your garden can provide a warm spot where adult butterflies can bask in the sun and warm their bodies for flying.

Plants that attract Butterflies:

Perennials:

- Achillea – Yarrow
- Alcea – Hollyhock
- Arabis – Rock Cress
- Asclepias – Butterfly Weed
- Aster – Hardy Aster
- Astilbe – False Spirea
- Baptisia – False Indigo
- Caryopteris – Blue Beard
- Centaurea – Bachelor Button
- Coreopsis – Tickseed
- Dianthus – Garden Pinks
- Echinacea – Cone Flower
- Echinops – Globe Thistle
- Gaillardia – Blanket Flower
- Helenium – Sneezeweed
- Hemerocallis – Day Lily
- Iberis – Candy Tuft
- Liatris – Gayfeather
- Ligustrum – Privet
- Lupinus – Lupine
- Malva – Mallow
- Mondarda – Bee Balm
- Nepeta – Catmint
- Phlox p. – Summer Phlox
- Salvia – Meadow Sage
- Scabiosa – Pincushion Flower
- Solidago – Goldenrod
- Verbena – Verbena
- Viola – Pansy

Annuals and Herbs:

- Ageratum
- Cosmos
- Lavender
- Mint
- Mum
- Snap Dragon
- Sunflower
- Sweet Alyssum
- Zinnia

Trees and Shrubs:

- Acer saccharum – Sugar Maple
- Betula nigra – River Birch
- Buddleia – Butterfly Bush
- Cercis canadensis – Eastern Redbud
- Cornus florida – Flowering Dogwood
- Salix nigra – Black Willow
- Syringa – Lilac
- Vaccinium – Blueberry

Host Plants:

Perennials:

- Aster spp. – Aster
- Rudbeckia – Black Eyed Susan
- Asclepias – Butterfly Weed
- Echinacea – Coneflower
- Alcea – Hollyhock
- Malva spp. – Mallow
- Leucanthemum – Shasta Daisy
- Artemisia – Mugworts
- Sedum – Stonecrop
- Viola – Violet

Annuals and Herbs:

- Carrot
- Dill
- Fennel
- Nasturtium
- Parsley
- Passion Flower Vine
- Rue
- Ruellia
- Snapdragon

Trees and Shrubs:

- Cornus florida – Flowering Dogwood
- Magnolia – Sweet Bay
- Salix - Willow
- Ulmus spp. – Elm Tree

