

*Few things are more enchanting than a garden filled with fluttering butterflies. They bring out the delighted child in each of us as they shimmer in the sunlight. Asking very little, they give us an unsurpassed gift of symmetry, beauty, and delicacy.*

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# Butterfly Gardening

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Enjoying their performance, we don't always realize that, if we want to have a large number of adult butterflies, we have to think about providing habitat needs for their whole life cycle.

At the same time, we will be making a contribution to the conservation movement, as well as bringing life and sparkling beauty to our homes.

To quote Robert Pyle, *"I am very concerned about what I call the extinction of experience – the loss of everyday species within our own radius of reach. When we lose the common wildlife in our immediate surroundings, we run the risk of becoming inured to nature's absence, blind to delight, and, eventually, alienated from the land."*

By planting a butterfly garden today, we are insuring our continued involvement with nature tomorrow.

There are a variety of theories about where butterflies got their name. One of the most charming proposes that it began in England when people saw the woodlands alight with yellow brimstones and compared them to "butter flying."

However they came to be named, early naturalists certainly had no idea that caterpillars and butterflies were different stages of the same

creature. For many centuries, it was accepted that caterpillars arose from the morning dew on leaves. Even with our modern knowledge, the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly certainly seems miraculous.

There are many guidebooks to help you identify the different butterflies, and most will include a discussion of their life cycle.

### Four Stages

Briefly, there are four stages, each very different from the others.

- The butterfly begins as an egg, hatching in 5 to 10 days.
- The resulting caterpillar does nothing much except eat and grow, shedding its skin four to six times.
- In two to four weeks it will form a pupa which, within its chrysalis, or cocoon, takes on the body of the adult.
- The butterfly emerges in 10 to 15 days and, after mating, the cycle begins again.

The whole process is known as "metamorphosis," or, literally, "change of form."

### Loss of Habitat

As our appreciation of these lovely creatures grows, so does our realization that butterflies,

like so many other species, are suffering a declining population due to loss of habitat and the increased use of insecticides and other pollutants.

While killing and mounting them may have some importance for scientific studies, the rest of us benefit far more by observing them in the garden and collecting them only through photographs.

We can identify many varieties, even in an area as small as a window box, and the more we learn, the more fascinating they become.

### 40 Million Years

For instance, they originated about 40 million years ago, when flowering plants were beginning to proliferate. Their proboscis, the long, hollow feeding tube, remains coiled up beneath the head when not in use.

Some species prefer fermenting fruit or tree sap to nectar. The female will drum and scratch a leaf with her feet to release chemicals that tell her that it is a suitable place to lay her eggs.

Bright color often warns predators that a butterfly tastes bad. Learning about butterflies can be a treat for the whole family. As E.O. Wilson wrote, "*Splendor awaits in minute proportions.*"

Before you start planting your garden, explore your yard and nearby areas. What species do you see and which ones do you want to attract? What plants do those prefer for nectar and larval food? Do you want a garden exclusively designed for butterflies, or do you prefer to incorporate appropriate plants into an existing bed? Is your gardening style formal or casual? How much time can you contribute to maintenance?

### Ask These Questions

By asking yourself these questions, you can save a lot of time later on. You can design a large garden, or you may decide to start on a very small scale, with just a few selected plants, and add more each year.

One of the first considerations when planning your garden is location. Choose a sunny area, not only because most butterfly-attracting flowers grow best in full sun, but because the butterflies themselves only fly when there is sun to keep their bodies warm.

On cloudy days they may not fly at all. Often the best time to get a photograph is when the temperature is cooler, while they are basking in the sun until they have warmed to flight temperature.

Sunny garden spots enable butterflies to feed earlier and

later in the day and to take enough time to find suitable egg-laying spots, as well as decreasing the time it takes for eggs and caterpillars to develop.

Flat rocks and evergreens added to your garden will absorb the sun's warmth, and butterflies will enjoy basking on the stones to raise their body temperature more quickly.

### Water is Critical

As with all wildlife, water is essential. You can create a mud puddle in a corner of the garden, or sink a bowl in the ground and fill it with wet sand. Mud and sand are sources of nutrients, and sometimes you will see a bunch of male butterflies congregating at mud puddle areas after the water has evaporated, eating salt and other concentrated minerals.

It is also helpful if the butterfly garden can be protected from the wind. This will keep the temperature higher, and reduce the effort required to fight air currents as the butterflies feed. Taller flowers also benefit because they won't be blown over, and many plants will warm up and bloom at an earlier date.

### Protect From Wind

The wind can be broken by a line of shrubs, a fence, or a wall. For those that overwinter, there are commercial butterfly hibernation boxes, or you can

provide nearby trees with crevices, or create a log pile.

Although we may be attracted to the nectar-producing flowers because of their striking beauty, it is important not to neglect host plants. These are often native plants, and will lure female

butterflies in to lay eggs, then provide food for the caterpillars.

### Host Plants

Some species will search out and accept only one or two kinds of host plants, and in fact some caterpillars will

## Plants for the Butterfly Garden

This list is by no means complete, but will give you a good start in selecting plants for your garden. Your local nurseries will be able to tell you which ones will do best in your area, and may offer additional selections. Those with an asterisk (\*) are especially effective in attracting butterflies.

### SHRUBS:

*Butterfly bush .....	(Buddleia)
*Buttonbush .....	(Cephalanthus occidentalis)
Glossy abelia .....	(Abelia x Grandiflora)
Mountain laurel .....	
Lilac .....	(Syringa vulgaris)
Sweet pepperbush .....	(Clethra arborea)
Flame azalea .....	(Rhododendron spp.)
Mountain laurel .....	(Kalmia)
Honeysuckle shrub .....	(Lonicera tatarica)
Bluebeard .....	(Caryopteris x clandonensis)
Privet .....	(Ligustrum)

### PERENNIALS:

*Joe-Pye weed .....	(Eupatorium spp.)
*Purple Coneflower .....	(Echinacea purpurea)
*Anise Hyssop .....	(Hyssopus officinalis)
*New England aster .....	(Aster spp.)
*Butterfly weed .....	(Asclepias tuberosa)
*Black-eyed Susan .....	(Rudbeckia spp.)
Coreopsis .....	(Coreopsis spp.)
Veronica .....	(Veronica spp.)
Verbena .....	(Verbena canadensis)

### ANNUALS:

*Lantana .....	(Lantana camara)
*Pentas .....	(Pentas lanceolata)
*Cosmos .....	(Cosmos sulphureus)
Heliotrope .....	(Heliotrope arborescens)
Mexican sunflower .....	(Tithonia rotundifolia)
Flowering tobacco .....	(Nicotiana glauca)
Pincushion flower .....	(Scabiosa atropurpurea)
French marigold .....	(Tagetes patula)
Impatiens .....	(Impatiens wallerana)
Zinnia .....	(Zinnia elegans)

*Butterflies are insects and thus are at risk when you use insecticides. Consider putting up with some leaf-chewing, removing unwanted insects by hand, or using a homemade spray such as crushed garlic cloves in liquid soap.*

*Crawling insects dislike both the smell of the garlic and the stickiness of the soap.*

starve rather than eat another type of vegetation. Since individual females can lay up to 1600 eggs in their lifetime, providing appropriate host plants is one of the most reliable ways to increase the numbers of butterflies in your garden.

If they are too informal to suit your flower bed, plant them in an area away from your blossoms. Since many are native shrubs and wildflowers, they may already exist nearby.

### Single, Not Double

When choosing plants for your butterfly garden, choose single rather than double-flowered species. These allow easier access to the nectar.

Many butterflies prefer the colors of purple, yellow, orange, and red, especially with clusters of flat-topped or tubular blossoms.

Butterflies can see more colors than we can, including ultraviolet. For the greatest attraction, plant groups of the same plant and color, rather than one or two of each flower.

Butterflies also have a very sensitive sense of smell and will

home in on their favorite flower even from far away.

Check bloom times to provide blossoms throughout the growing season. Different heights are also important, since certain butterflies prefer to feed near the ground, while others like flowers atop tall stems.

### Tall Goes In Back

Plant your taller species to the back of the bed, gradually working down to the shorter ones in the front. Combining perennials (those that come back every year) and annuals (the ones that die in the

winter) will give you a full, lush garden with a long bloom time.

While butterflies don't care about the actual design of your garden, that may be of importance to you.

Decide where you will be when viewing your flowers and plan around that perspective. Think about what color scheme appeals to you. Colors are generally classified as "warm" (red, orange, yellow) or "cool" (purple, blue, white).

A garden is most often pleasing if it draws primarily from one group, with a few added accents from the other. To a palette that is primarily orange and red, add a touch of purple or blue; to the cool colors add a splash of yellow.

Warm colors are showy and vibrant, showing up best against a strong green background. Cool colors are restful, benefiting

### Host Plants and the Butterflies They Attract

Butterfly weed, Milkweed .....	Monarch
Parsley, Dill, Copper Fennel .....	Black Swallowtail
Blue Passionflower .....	Gulf Fritillary
Spicebush (Lindera) .....	Spicebush Swallowtail
Tulip Tree (Liriodendron) .....	Eastern Tiger Swallowtail
Vegetable plants, mustards .....	Whites
Pea family, marigolds, clovers .....	Sulphurs
Dogwood, clovers, vetches .....	Blues
Snapdragons .....	Buckeyes
Everlastings, thistles .....	Painted Ladies
Violets .....	Fritillaries
Willows, poplars .....	Admirals

from the addition of white to add sparkle and freshness.

## Hummingbirds

People who garden for butterflies are often interested in including flowers for hummingbirds as well. While they are two completely different creatures, both are nectar feeders and respond well to selective planting in the home habitat.

Like butterflies, hummingbirds are selective about the blossoms that they choose. Interestingly, hummingbirds are not born knowing which plants are suitable for them, but they are very curious and have good memories, learning quickly from trial and error.

## Look For Red

Generally speaking, hummingbirds look for red flowers that point out or hang down, have a high percentage of sugar in the nectar, and are less attractive to insects because they have no odor or place for easy landing.

A butterfly garden can be ideal if the right plants are included. It tends to have many flowers - a necessity since hummingbirds feed every 10 to 15 minutes – and the restrained use of insecticides means a healthy population of the small insects and spiders which are a critical part of the hummingbird's diet.

## Plants for Hummingbirds

A number of commercial hummingbird feeders and nectar mix formulas are also available to supplement the natural food supply.

Some of the more popular hummingbird plants that you might want to include are:

- Cardinal flower  
(*Lobelia cardinalis*)
- Standing cypress
- Eastern columbine  
(*Aquilegia canadensis*)
- Scarlet sage  
(*Salvia coccinea*)
- Bee balm  
(*Monarda didyma*)
- Jewelweed  
(*Impatiens capensis*)
- Hibiscus
- Trumpet honeysuckle  
(*Lonicera sempervirens*)

This article was written by  
Maryland Master Wildlife Habitat  
Naturalist Cathy Gilleland.

For more information or for the  
name of a Master Wildlife Habitat  
Naturalist in your area,  
please contact:

WindStar Wildlife Institute  
10072 Vista Court  
Myersville, Maryland 21773  
Phone: 301-293-3351  
E-mail: [wildlife@windstar.org](mailto:wildlife@windstar.org)  
<http://www.windstar.org>

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