

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Butterfly Gardening James C. Schmidt, Horticulturist University of Illinois



There is no more delightful decoration for a garden than nature's own—butterflies. On warm sunny days, these visitors provide color and motion that doubles the pleasure of gardening. Fortunately, it takes very little effort to make your yard more attractive to butterflies.

Butterflies will visit and probably stay to lay eggs, wherever there is a variety of a plant for food and shelter, some moisture, and absence of pesticides. While there are typically more species in warm climates than in cooler ones, there are butterflies everywhere in the country. Their appearance in your back yard ultimately depends on whether their favorite plants are growing there – certain ones to support the larvae, others to support adult butterflies.

Garden Design Tips

☐ Provide sun, a place for resting, and				
protection from the wind. Because they are cold-				
blooded, butterflies are usually not active on cool				
or cloudy days. As they need to warm up the				
muscles used in flying, butterflies do best in				
warm sunny locations. Rocks and logs, which				
will heat up in the sun, give butterflies places to				
bask and warm up for earlier take-offs.				

Provided by: University of Illinois Extension Cook County South 4747 Lincoln Mall Drive, Suite 601 Matteson, IL 60443 Phone: 708-679-6889 Fax: 708-679-6855 www.extension.uiuc.edu/cook

☐ ☐ <i>Provide a place for roosting</i> . Add a
butterfly shelter mounted to a tree or a stake
about 18 inches high in an area among the nectar
plants. Butterflies naturally roost in shrubs, tree
crevices, under bark or in log piles.

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seasoi	n. Choo	se from a	nong ar	nnuals	s and
pereni	nials tha	nt flower a	ll seaso	n.	

\square \square <i>Use large masses of plants</i> butterflies are
attracted to color, not individual plants.

Provide Food for Larvae

Caterpillars eat leaves and sometimes flowers and seeds of certain plants. They are often picky eaters and may only feed on a specific plant or group of plants.

LARVAL FOOD	FOR THIS BUTTERFLY
PLANTS	LARVAE
Snapdragon (Antirrhinum	Buckeye
majus)	
Butterfly Weed (Asclepias	Monarch, Queen
tuberosa)	
Red Cabbage (Brassica	Cabbage White, Checkered
oleracea capitata)	White
Sweet Pea (Lathyrus	Eastern Tailed Blue
odoratus)	
Nasturtium (Tropaeolum	European Cabbage White
majus)	
Rue (Ruta graveolens)	Eastern Black Swallowtail
Pipevine (Arstolochia	Pipevine Swallowtail
tomentosa)	(Battus philenor)
Carrots, parsley	Plack Swellowteil (Panilia
(Petroselinum crispum), dill	Black Swallowtail (<i>Papilio</i> polyxenes asterius)
(Anethum graveolens)	potysenes usterius)
Prickly ash (Zanthoxylum	Giant Swallowtail (Papilio
americanum)	cresphontes)
ancreatum,	

LARVAL FOOD	FOR THIS BUTTERFLY	
PLANTS	LARVAE	
Spicebush (Lindera	Spicebush Swallowtail	
benzoin), sassafras	(Papilio troilus)	
Wild cherry, birch, ash		
(Papilia glaucus) poplar,	Tiger Swallowtail	
apple, tulip tree		
Pawpaw(Asimina triloba)	Zebra Swallowtail (<i>Papilio marcellus</i>)	
Million of (Analogica)	Monarch (Danaus	
Milkweeds (Asclepias)	plexippus)	
Violets	Great Spangled Fritillary	
Violets	(Speyeria cybele)	
Thirtles hashalada hattana	Painted Lady (Vanessa	
Thistles, bachelor's buttons	cardut)	
Pussy willow, plums,	Viceroy (Limenitis	
cherries	archippus)	

Other larvae food sources include dock, elm, hackberry, and thistle.

Provide Nectar for Adults

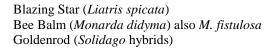
Adult butterflies feed primarily on the nectar of flowers and will feed from a variety of available flowers. While they are attracted by both color and scent, butterflies have difficulty picking out individual flowers, so large masses are best for attracting them. Some suggested plants are:

Annuals

Ageratum (Ageratum houstonianum)
Sunny Cosmos (Cosmos sulphureus)
Globe amaranth (Gomphrena globosa)
Sunflower (Helianthus annuus)
Heliotrope (Heliotropium arborescens)
Lantana (Lantana camara)
Melampodium (Melampodium paludosum)
Flowering Tobacco (Nicotiana alata)
Egyptian Star Cluster (Penta lanceolata)
Petunia (Petunia x hybrida)
Blue Salvia (Salvia farinacea)
Mexican sunflower (Tithonia rotundifolia)
Brazilian verbena (Verbena bonariensis)
Zinnia (Zinnia elegans)

Perennials

Common yarrow (Achillea millefolium)
Butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa)
New England Aster (Aster novae-angliae)
Butterfly Bush (Buddleia davidii
Coneflower (Echinacea purpurea)
Joe-Pye Weed (Eupatorium maculatum)
Blanket Flower (Gaillardia x grandiflora)
Autumn Joy Sedum (Hylotelephium x 'Autumn Joy')



Trees and Shrubs

Hawthorn (*Crataegus* sp.) Privet (*Ligustrum amurense*) Fruit trees (*Prunus, Pyrus* sp.) Lilac (*Syringa* spp.)

Wildflowers

Blazing Stars (*Liatris*)
Black-Eyed Susan
Boneset (*Eupatorium*)
Clover

Butterfly Weed (Asclepias tuberosa)

Coneflowers Goat's beard Goldenrods Dogbane

Ironweed (Veronia)

Joe-Pye Weed (Eupatorium)

Milkweeds Phlox

New England Aster

Spearmint Thistles Verbena

Wild Bergamot (Monarda)

Remember that butterflies are attracted to the flowers. Look for plants that bloom in the late spring and summer. That may be difficult for most trees and shrubs but there are some forms that bloom later. Check with a nurseryman.

Sources for More Information

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Mikula, Rick. The Family Butterfly Book, 2006

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Wagner, David, Caterpillars of Eastern North America Princeton University Press. 2005

Common Butterflies of the Chicago Region downloadable guide http://fm2.fieldmuseum.org/plantguides/guideimages.asp?I D=591

