

## BUTTERFLY GARDENING

**Why create a butterfly garden?** With their grace and beauty, butterflies fill our gardens with excitement, joy, and life. Yet there is much more to be gained. When gardening for butterflies, we are creating healthy garden ecosystems that supply food and safe havens for other pollinators, as well, including hummingbirds which are attracted to many of the same flowers as butterflies. While producing abundant sources of nectar, our gardens will be supporting green lacewings, ladybugs, and a myriad of other beneficial insects that help us with pest control. And as more people plant these gardens, we will be creating corridors that assist with the migration of butterflies and hummingbirds.

### BUTTERFLY GARDEN BASIC REQUIREMENTS

- 1) Pesticide-free environment
- 2) Plenty of sunshine
- 3) Flowers to provide nectar for the adult butterflies
- 4) Host plants to provide food for the butterfly larvae—better known as caterpillars!

**Remember, butterflies go through metamorphosis.** Yes, to have butterflies we must have caterpillars. Butterflies go through four life-cycle stages: adult, egg, larva, and pupa (chrysalis). Fortunately, few butterfly caterpillars are considered serious pest insects, and some are as colorful and fun to watch as the butterflies. Plants that are eaten by caterpillars are called “host plants.” Probably the most well-known host plants are the milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.) required by the Monarch butterfly. Monarch butterflies only lay their eggs on milkweed, and the caterpillars that emerge will only eat milkweed leaves.

**First step to butterfly gardening: avoid pesticides.** Avoid using toxins that kill a broad range of insects, and avoid those that are specific to caterpillars. Plan for some feeding by caterpillars and place host plants where leaf damage can be tolerated aesthetically. Avoiding pesticides will make your garden attractive to beneficial insects that will help you with pest control.

**Plant your butterfly garden in full sun.** Most of the recommended nectar plants require at least six hours of full sun. In addition, butterflies need sunshine to help them regulate their body temperature, as they cannot fly if their bodies are too cold. You can often see them, wings outstretched, soaking up the morning sun in preparation for a day of searching for nectar.

### PLANTS FOR THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN

**Butterflies love brightly colored, fragrant flowers with abundant nectar.** Many butterflies are attracted to red (as are hummingbirds), and some have a preference

for yellow flowers. In addition, butterflies are usually attracted to blue, hot-pink, purple, and orange flowers. Composites (flowers in the aster family) are particularly favored as they supply a relatively flat “landing pad” with lots of tiny flowers in the center to supply nectar.

**Plant host plants to provide food for the caterpillars.** See plant list below for suggestions.

**Mix regional native plants with other plantings.** Just by growing a wide variety of native plants you will be supporting the larval stage of many types of butterflies, as well as supplying fruit, nuts, and shelter for birds or other wildlife.

**Plant a diversity of plants.** Include plants with a variety of heights and growing habits and with bloom times from spring through fall. In windy areas use plants such as the Eastern native conifer, *Juniperus virginiana*, or the many ceanothus shrubs native to the West Coast to supply protection from wind and offer secure areas for resting butterflies.

## TIPS

- Create a damp area of exposed earth or sand to supply minerals and moisture for butterflies.
- If you don't have room for a garden, you can attract butterflies by planting in containers on a patio or balcony or in window boxes.
- Some butterflies are attracted to overripe bananas, oranges, or other fruit. Hang a shallow dish from a tree or place fruit on a platform that can be viewed from a window.
- Having some good field guides handy, such as those listed below in Further Resources, will enhance you and your family's enjoyment of your butterfly garden.

## RECOMMENDED BUTTERFLY PLANTS

Many of the following plants can be seen in the USBG National Garden. Most of the plants in this list are native to eastern and/or central United States; a few are western natives and a few are non-invasive plants that are not native to North America. To check the nativity of the plants go to <http://plants.usda.gov/>, the USDA's Plants Database. For further plant recommendations, go to [www.naba.org/pubs/bgh](http://www.naba.org/pubs/bgh), the North American Butterfly Association's site for regional butterfly gardening brochures and regional PDF files of plants and the butterflies they attract.

## PLANTS FOR NECTAR SOURCES

### Shrubs

*Abelia* spp. (glossy abelia)

*Ceanothus* spp. & cultivars

(most ceanothus species are native to California; *Ceanothus americanus* is native to eastern and central North America)

*Clethra alnifolia* (summersweet)

*Caryopteris* spp. (bluebeard)

**Note:** Butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*) is no longer recommended due to its invasive nature.

### Herbaceous Perennials

*Aster* spp. (*Symphyotrichum* spp.) (aster species)

*Coreopsis* spp. (tickseed)

*Echinacea laevigata* (smooth purple coneflower)

*Echinacea pallida* (pale purple coneflower, prairie coneflower)

*Echinacea paradoxa* (yellow coneflower)

*Echinacea purpurea* (purple coneflower)

*Echinacea simulata* (wavy-leaf purple coneflower)

*Dracocephalum* spp. (dragon's head)

*Gaillardia* sp. (blanket flower)

*Gaura lindheimeri* (Lindheimer's beeblossom)

*Helenium flexuosum* (purple-head sneezeweed)

*Heliopsis helianthoides* (smooth oxeye)

*Hibiscus laevis* (smooth rose-mallow)

*Hibiscus moscheutos* (swamp rose-mallow)

*Nepeta grandiflora* (giant catmint)

*Oenothera* spp. (evening primrose)

*Phlox carolina* (thickleaf phlox)

*Phlox paniculata* (fall phlox)

*Parthenium integrifolium* (American feverfew)

*Rudbeckia* spp. (black-eyed Susan)

*Sedum* spp. (sedum species & cultivars)

*Verbena* spp.

### Annuals

*Asclepias currasavica* (bloodflower)

*Helianthus annuus* (sunflower)

*Lantana* (use sterile cultivars)

## HOST PLANTS FOR BUTTERFLY LARVAE

### Trees

*Asimina triloba* (pawpaw)

*Betula nigra* (river birch)

*Carpinus caroliniana* (American hornbeam)

*Cercis canadensis* (Eastern redbud)  
*Cornus florida* (dogwood)  
*Juniperus virginiana* (Eastern red cedar)  
*Ptelea trifoliata* (common hop-tree)  
*Sassafras albidum* (sassafras)  
*Quercus* spp. (oak trees)

### **Shrubs**

*Ceanothus* spp. & cultivars  
*Lindera benzoin* (spicebush)  
*Mimulus aurantiacus* (sticky monkey flower; Oregon & California native)  
*Rhus glabra* (smooth sumac)  
*Rhus typhina* (staghorn sumac)  
*Viburnum* spp.

### **Herbaceous Perennials**

*Antennaria dioica* (pussy toes)  
*Aristolochia serpentaria* (Virginia snakeroot)  
*Aster* spp. (*Symphotrichum* spp.) (aster species)  
*Asclepias incarnata* ssp. *pulchra* (swamp milkweed)  
*Asclepias tuberosa* (butterfly weed)  
*Asclepias verticillata* (whorled milkweed)  
*Chelone glabra* (white turtlehead)  
*Chelone lyonii* (pink turtlehead)  
*Penstemon digitalis* (talus slope penstemon)

### **Further Resources**

#### **Books:**

*The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies*, by the National Audubon Society  
*The Butterfly Book: An Easy Guide to Butterfly Gardening, Identification, and Behavior*, by Donald & Lillian Stokes and Ernest Williams  
*Butterfly Gardening: Creating Summer Magic in Your Garden*, by The Xerces Society and Smithsonian Institution  
*The National Wildlife Federation Attracting Birds, Butterflies and Other Backyard Wildlife*, by David Mizejewski  
*Peterson First Guide to Caterpillars of North America*, by Amy Bartlett Wright and Roger Tory Peterson

#### **Websites:**

North American Butterfly Association, 973-285-0907, [www.naba.org](http://www.naba.org)  
North American Pollinator Protection Campaign, [www.nappc.org](http://www.nappc.org)  
National Wildlife Federation, [www.nwf.org](http://www.nwf.org) (“Why Garden for Wildlife,” [www.nwf.org/backyard](http://www.nwf.org/backyard))  
The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org)