



## Attracting Butterflies to Your Garden

Butterflies, alighting on one flower and then another, have long fascinated and delighted humans with their gorgeous colors. You, too, can have this wonderful experience of intermingling butterflies and flowers by planting a butterfly garden.

Successful butterfly gardening can be done on a small scale, or as an integral part of the landscape. It is relatively simple to both attract butterflies and have a garden that suits your taste and needs.

### GROW LOTS OF PLANTS

Food is the key factor in creating a successful butterfly haven. The main food for adult butterflies is nectar from flowers. Certain flowers are more appealing to butterflies than others.

Just what kinds of flowers do butterflies find enticing? Butterflies are attracted by the form of the flower. For the most part, butterflies prefer single-petal flowers, which provide an area for them to light on. Fast growing annuals such as zinnia, lantana, marigold, cosmos, pentas and heliotrope are butterfly favorites.

Perennials offer food sources that bloom at varying times throughout the spring and summer. Perennial choices include butterfly weed, coneflower, yarrow, sedum, coreopsis, loosestrife, garden phlox, aster ... just to name a few.

Many flowers produce nectar but butterflies clearly favor some varieties over others. For example, Buddleia, or butterfly bush, seems irresistible to butterflies and belongs in every garden. Buddleia are fast growing shrubs that come in a variety of sizes to accommodate any type of garden, blooming from June through frost.

When planting flowers, group them together and they will be more enticing to butterflies. Given a choice among equally appealing flowers, butterflies usually choose those that are most abundant. Be sure also that your garden offers nectaring flowers throughout the blooming season so that butterflies can always find food. Also have nectar plants of varying heights, for smaller species of butterflies that stay low, while larger species often prefer to stay high when feeding. From a butterfly's point of view, you cannot have too many flowers.

### CHOOSE A SUNNY SPOT

Sun is extremely important for both butterflies and flowers. Butterflies need sun to keep their bodies warm enough to fly, about 85°-100°. When the air temperature is too cool, they bask in the sun to warm themselves to flight temperature. This is why on cloudy days you may not see butterflies at all, and why on a partly cloudy day, when the sun is hidden by clouds, they are perched, waiting for the sun.

Consider including a flat, rocky area in your garden, where butterflies can bask in the sun while absorbing the warmth of the rocks. Imbed several flat rocks in the soil and watch for butterflies as they come to bask.



*A variety of shrubs, perennials, annuals and herbs help attract butterflies to your landscape*

# JOHNSON'S • GARDEN • CENTERS

Sunny spots are also good for eggs and caterpillars, as warm habitats enable them to develop more rapidly. Thus, a sunny garden will not only attract more butterflies but may actually produce more butterflies as well.

## PROVIDE A SHELTER

A butterfly garden should be planted in a location that is sheltered from the wind. Because butterflies thrive better in a sheltered garden than in one exposed to wind, plant vines and shrubs around the perimeter of the garden to provide a wind break.

If possible, select plants that provide nectar as well as shelter, such as lilac, viburnum, honeysuckle shrub, butterfly bush, caryopteris and Japanese honeysuckle vine.

## AVOID PESTICIDES

Butterflies are insects, so pesticides that rid your garden of insects also rid your garden of butterflies. This includes the use of the bacterial insecticide BT, *Bacillus Thuringiensis*. It is fatal to butterfly larvae.

## GROW CATERPILLAR FOOD

If you want even more butterflies in your garden provide food for caterpillars (the larval stage of butterflies) as well; they require a different menu than adult butterflies.

Caterpillars are happy to munch their way through an assortment of leaves, stems, and buds. They are often highly selective in their tastes, and some species will only eat one species of plant.

It is actually the adult female butterfly that chooses these plants and then lays her eggs on them. So by planting larval food plants you will attract egg-laying females to your garden.

Irresistible draws for Swallowtail caterpillars include Queen Anne's Lace, parsley, dill and rue. Monarch caterpillars prefer host plants of milkweed and butterfly weed. The Gulf Fritillary caterpillar chooses Passion Vine for munching.

In general, the host plants you provide for your favorite butterflies will attract only those specific butterflies and, in most cases, the larvae leave other garden plants untouched.

## RAISING BUTTERFLIES

Rearing the eggs, caterpillars, and pupae of butterflies inside your home can be a lot of fun and one of the best ways to learn about butterfly lives.

For raising caterpillars, a small empty aquarium with a screen top makes a good container. Cover a small vase or cup of water with plastic wrap and poke the stems of the host plants, with eggs attached through it and into the water. This makes sure that if the caterpillar crawls down the plant stem it will not end up in the water. Then place this into the aquarium.

Your main task when raising a caterpillar is providing it with enough food. Give it leaves from plant on which you found the caterpillar or its egg. When the caterpillar is small it will eat very little, but as it grows larger you may have to keep it supplied with new leaves each day.

Remember that the caterpillar will become still when molting its skin. Put twigs and sticks into the container for the caterpillar to crawl on when shedding or when looking for a place to pupate.

When an adult emerges from a pupa, it hangs upside down while its wings expand and then harden. Once the adults wings have hardened, carry it outside in the container and place the opened container near some flowers so that the butterfly can leave and feed.

Butterflies provide an element of active beauty to the garden and opportunities to observe their habits and brilliant colors. It is fascinating to observe the unfolding of their life cycles and their interactions with plants.

Stop by Johnson's Garden Center soon and we'll show you just how easy it is to start your own butterfly garden.

Revised 3-07