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Butterfly Gardens For Your Region

By Samuel Murray

I grew up in the city surrounded by asphalt and concrete sidewalks, brick buildings and vacant lots

- but there was no lack of nature or butterflies in my life. Amid the sprawl of a decaying urban landscape, the overgrown vacant lots choked with `weeds' attracted so many butterflies that they would perch on my shoulders and hands if I was still enough. These `accidental' butterfly gardens provided all the ingredients that butterflies require to congregate en masse. These same ingredients can turn your garden into a fairy wonderland of fluttering wings and color.

Over the past thirty years, butterfly gardening has become popular, both to attract the beautiful travelers and to help preserve species of butterflies that were dwindling due to human encroachment into their natural habitats. If you're planning a butterfly garden, it's important to keep in mind that there is no one recipe for a successful garden. Butterfly species that are indigenous to different areas are attracted to different types of plants. In order to foster butterflies, you'll need to know the butterfly species that are found in your area, and provide them with plants that are favored food sources for adult butterflies as well as those plants that they prefer for laying their eggs and nourishing larva.

There are, however, some standards that apply to all butterfly gardens. Wherever you live and whatever butterflies you hope to attract, you'll attract more of them if you follow a few simple basics:

Plant flowers in clumps and drifts.

Butterflies will flock to large expanses of flowers in similar colors that bloom at the same time rather than to single plants with just a few blooms. A carpet of violets, a sea of buttercups or a wide open field full of Queen Anne's Lace is sure to be visited by dozens of butterflies.

Butterfly gardens need to provide both sun and shade.

Like all insects, butterflies are cold-blooded creatures. They thrive on warm sun, and will bask on flat rocks or perch for long minutes on the branches of a high bush in the sunlight. At the same time, they need shade and shelter when the sun is too hot, or on cool, cloudy days. An area that gets bright sun for at least 4-6 hours per day is the best spot for a butterfly garden, but don't forget to include

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landscaping details that offer shade.

Butterflies love puddles.

Add a sunken birdbath to your garden, or provide a cluster of rocks that traps rain water to give butterflies a cool spot where they can indulge their love of standing water.

Regional Butterfly Species and Plants

Different species of butterflies frequent different parts of the country. You can find more information about which plants are best for your area at a local nursery, or the agricultural extension unit at a local university. For quick reference, though, here's a short list of butterflies and plants that they love by region.

Northeastern N. America

>From W. Virginia up through Quebec and as far west as Indiana and Ohio

Butterflies: Swallowtails (black, spicebush and tiger), Cabbage White, Pearl Crescent, Monarch, Buckeye, Red-spotted Purple, Great Spangled Fritillary

Plants: Milkweed (monarchs), fennel, parsley, carrot and dill (black swallowtails), spicebush (spicebush swallowtails), nasturtium (cabbage white), violets (great spangled fritillary), willow, birch, beech, aspen, wild cherry (many species)

Nectar Flowers: Buddleia, Heliotrope, Lantana, Milkweed, Mint, Pentas, Porterweed, Verbena and Zinnias.

Southeastern U.S. Butterflies: Swallowtails (black, spicebush, tiger and pipevine), Buckeye, Pearl Crescent, Monarch, Cloudless Sulphur, Gulf Fritillary, Red-spotted purple

Plants: Fennel, carrot, spicebush, dill, parsley, pipevine (swallowtails), wild cherry, poplar, sassafras, passiflora, wild senna, asters, milkweed
Nectar Flowers: same as northeast

Southern Florida Butterflies: Polydamas swallowtail, giant swallowtail, zebra longwing, Julia, gulf fritillary, orange-barred sulphur, cloudless sulphur, monarch, queen

Plants: milkweed, wild senna, passiflora, wild lime, citrus, dutchman's pipe

Midwest Butterflies: Swallowtails, Buckeye, Cloudless Sulphur, Pearl Crescent, Cabbage White, Monarch, Viceroy

Plants: Pipevines, fennel, carrot, dill, parsley, violets, nasturtium, wild senna, asters, snapdragon, verbena, cabbage, milkweed

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New Mexico, Texas Butterflies: Patch, Hackberry, Monarch, Pearl Crescent, Question Mark, Buckeye, Cloudless Sulphur, Gulf Fritillary

Plants: sunflowers, passiflora, hackberry, wild senna, milkweed, nettles, asters

Arizona, California, Nevada Butterflies: Western tiger swallowtail, anise swallowtail, two-tailed swallowtail, black swallowtail, pale swallowtail, pipevine swallowtail, cloudless sulphur, west coast lady, Monarch, gulf fritillary

Plants: Fennel, carrots, parsley, dill, wild senna, wild plums, buckthorns, wild cherries, wild lilacs, hollyhocks, ashes, willows, aspens, poplars

Western States and Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta Butterflies: Western tiger swallowtail, pale swallowtail, cabbage white, striped hairstreak, Wiedemeyer's Admiral, mourning cloak, monarch, great spangled fritillary, painted lady

Plants: wild plums and cherries, aspen, willow, poplar, sunflowers, buckthorns, wild lilacs, nasturtium, blueberries, ashes, violet, chokecherry.

This article courtesy of

<http://www.flowers-guide.net>

How to Attract Butterflies to Your Garden

By Kathy Burns-Millyard

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The fluttering of the butterfly through your garden is no accident if you planned your garden carefully. The adult butterfly flutters from flower to flower – sipping nectar from many flowers in your gardens, while other adult butterflies search for areas to lay their larvae. It is good to take note that the butterfly garden is going to differ from other areas of your garden. Your natural instincts will be to kill off pests, larvae and creatures in the garden, but in the butterfly garden your best results are noticed when you use organic gardening: Which means no chemicals at all.

In you want to include the use of butterflies in your landscape you will need to create a safety zone for your butterflies to feel safe. Butterflies frequent habitual zones, where they feel safe and where areas of the landscape meet with the tree lines. Creating your butterfly gardens near or around trees will help in attracting even more of these graceful creatures to your gardens.

A tip in attracting the Black Swallowtail or the Anise Swallowtail is this: Plant parsley, dill or fennel in your gardens, these plants attract this certain butterfly. If these herbs are not your favorites, you can attract other types of butterflies using other flowers. To attract the Fritillary butterfly for instance, plant

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Lupine flowers your garden. Or you may want to consider planting Snapdragons to attract butterflies that are native in your own area. Your early butterfly gardens are going to attract butterflies only in passing, but creating and growing the gardens that offer a safe haven for the butterfly will urge them to stay in your garden.

Butterflies are attracted to areas of your gardens where they can gather food for their offspring. The caterpillar will eat from the plants while the adult butterflies will sip on the nectar of the flowers. As your plants, shrubs, and flowers mature, the amount of butterflies to your gardens will also increase. The plants and flowers that you put in your garden this year will attract only a few, but in the years to come the natural instinct of the butterfly will lead them to your garden.

What is the adult butterfly searching for in your gardens? The butterfly searches for areas to take shelter from the high winds, the rains, and the summer storms. This is where the trees and shrubs in your gardens become important in protecting the butterfly and offering shelter. During the normal, warm sunny summer day the butterfly wants the wide-open areas of your lawn and garden.

Butterflies will seek soft soil that is sandy-like to find water. The sand-like soil that allows water to puddle up after a rainstorm is a butterfly's delight. The developing stages of the caterpillar to the butterfly are observed often in the established butterfly garden.

By creating the atmosphere in the garden that offers the shelter, food, water and the fragrance the butterfly is searching for you will have Butterfly Garden success.

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