

Creating a Butterfly Garden

In the voice of a butterfly, in 1874, Hans Christian Andersen expressed what we all know to be true, for butterflies and humans alike:

"Just living is not enough," said the butterfly, "one must have sunshine, freedom and a little flower."

- Hans Christian Andersen, *The Complete Fairy Tales*

Today, over 20,000 species of butterflies of the Order Lepidoptera are seeking sunshine, freedom and a little flower – but to elaborate on the “flower” – what plants, flowers or structures can you place in *your* butterfly garden to attract these winged beauties? With a little research and planning, it is not difficult to provide what a butterfly needs – right in your own backyard.

✓ Research and select butterflies that inhabit the region where you live.

- For a list of butterflies by U.S. state and details on each species go to:
<http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/checklists>.

✓ Determine which food and host plants are required for their habitat.

- Native plants are often better choices, as they already thrive in your area; a mixture of both perennials and annuals are best.
- Pay close attention to plants that may serve double-duty as both host and food sources; plants for larvae and adults both! [HLA-6430](#)
- Butterflies are attracted to particular plant attributes, like flower color and structure, and plant height.
- Confirm when purchasing food source seeds or plants that the cultivar produces nectar; some of the newer ones are bred more for appearance than nectar production. Some good nectar-producing options are marigolds, petunias and asters.

✓ Consider the landscape or area for your sanctuary, and butterfly life behaviors.

- Examine light, water and vegetation resources that exist already.
- Roosting: Butterflies “roost” when they’re resting; they prefer areas that shield them from wind and predators. Plantings of varying heights, as well as rock or natural wood structures provide safe havens, while trees and shrubs can provide wind protection.
- Puddling: Moist areas with shallow puddles encourage gathering, and the butterflies are believed to benefit from the salts and minerals found in the damp earth and water.
- Basking: Butterflies are cold blooded, and enjoy warming themselves in the sun. Provide rocks or exposed soil that will warm to sun exposure. Areas that receive six hours or more sun daily are favorable.
- Most species do not migrate but are resident to particular areas. Among these will be “generalist” (not so picky) and “specialist” (picky!) types, so look for host and food source vegetation options that may serve both types.
- Making minor changes to existing landscaping is often favorable to a larger overhaul...so be careful not to disturb any existing resident species. Use very few insecticides and no bug zappers.

Following these tips will help create a habitat to support the entire life cycle of the butterfly – native host plants for caterpillars, nectar-producing flowers for adult food sources – and a vegetative structure that will provide safety and will encourage healthy active and reproductive behaviors.

Creating a sustainable butterfly habitat is a rewarding effort – one that will continue to bring a joyful and satisfying return year after year.

Resources:

HLA-6430 Landscaping to Attract Butterflies, Moths, and Skippers

<http://pods.dasnr.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-1126/HLA-6430web%20color.pdf>

<http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/checklists>

http://www.nababutterfly.com/guide_index.html