Butterfly Gardening

Attracting Butterflies To Gardens In The Great Lakes Watershed

To attract the greatest number and variety of butterflies and have them as residents in your yard, you will need to have plants that serve the needs of all life stages of the butterfly. They need specific plant species on which to lay eggs, food plants for the larvae, plants on which to form a chrysalis and nectar sources as food for the adult.

Larval Host Plants

In their larval stage, butterflies require very specific host plants on which to feed. For example, the monarch butterfly, in its larval stage, feeds only on plants in the milkweed family (Asclepiadaceae) such as common milkweed, butterfly weed and swamp milkweed. Don’t worry if butterfly caterpillars are munching on the leaves—remember, this is their food. They rarely defoliate plants.

Attracting Adult Butterflies: The Search for Nectar

Adults searching for nectar are most attracted to orange, purple, yellow or red blossoms that are flat-topped or clustered and have short flower tubes that allow the butterfly to reach the nectar with its proboscis. Nectar-producing plants should be grown in open, sunny areas, as adults rarely feed on plants in the shade.

To successfully create butterfly habitat in your garden, do not use synthetic pesticides (which include herbicides, fungicides, etc.) as these are toxic to butterflies.

Larval Host Plant

- wild lupine: Lupinus perennis
- popular: Populus, ash
- elm: Ulmus, willow
- Salix
- turtlehead: Chelone glabra
- spice bush: Lindera benzoin, sassafras
- Sasafras albidum
- violet: Viola spp.
- dogwood: Cornus, sumac
- Iblus aster: Aster spp.
- New Jersey tea: Ceanothus americanus
- showy tick trefoil: Desmodium canadense
- blue vervain: Verbena hastata
- milkweed: Asclepias
- Butterfly Species
- Kinner blue, frostred alight
- mourning cloak
- mourning cloak
- Baltimore butterfly
- spice bush swallowtail: spice bush swallowtail
- fritillaries
- spring azure
- pearl crescent
- spring azure
- motiled duskywing
- eastern tallied blue
- hoary edge buckeye
- monarch

Native Perennials to Attract Nectar-seeking Adult Butterflies

- Bergamot: Monarda fistulosa: Tubular lavender flowers from July to August. Grows 90-120 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- Black-eyed Susan: Rudbeckia hirta: Bright yellow blooms from June until frost. Grows 60-90 cm in most soil types. Full sun to light shade.
- Blazing star: Liatris spp.: Distinctive flower spike covered in purple flowers from July to August. Grows 30-150 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- Evening primrose: Oenothera biennis: Prolific yellow flowers from July to October. Grows 120-240 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- Culver’s root: Verbenaca virginica: White flower spikes bloom from July to August. Grows 60-120 cm, prefers moist soil but will also do well in average conditions. Full sun.
- Grey-headed coneflower: Ratibida pinnata: Yellow flowers drop around a distinctive, tall centre from June to August. Grows 90-150 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- Ironweed: Vernonia altissima: Vivid purple flower clusters from July to September. Grows 90-180 cm, prefers moist soil but will also do well in average conditions. Full sun.
- Lance-leaved coreopsis: Coreopsis lanceolata: Prolific gold flowers from July to September. Grows 30-60 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- Stiff goldenrod: Solidago rigidissima: Large, flat yellow flower clusters in mid- to late summer. Grows 30-120 cm in a wide range of soils, from wet to dry, rich to nutrient-poor. Full sun.
- Wild lupine: Lupinus perennis: Spikes of blue pea-like blossoms from May to July. Grows 30-60 cm in well-drained, sandy soil. Full sun to part shade.
- * Not native to the Rouge Park.

Recommended References

- Butterfly Gardening: Quarterly PO. Box 39031, Seattle, Washington 98103.

For more information about the North American Native Plant Society, its Seed Exchange, other fact sheets in this series, and the quarterly newsletter, The Blazing Star, please contact the NANPS at: • Box 84, Station D, Toronto, Ontario M 4Y 2L7; (416) 631-4438 • nanps@nanps.org • Web site: http://www.nanps.org

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Attracting Butterflies

If you are interested in attracting butterflies to your garden, it is important to have plants that serve various needs of all life stages of the butterfly. They need larval host plants on which to feed. For example, the monarch butterfly caterpillar requires milkweed as its host plant. In their larval stage, butterflies consume these plants, which are also nutritious for the adult butterfly. Monarch butterflies feed only on plants in the milkweed family (Asclepiadaceae) such as common milkweed, butterfly weed, and swamp milkweed. It is important not to worry if butterfly caterpillars are munching on the leaves—remember, this is their food. They are not harmful to other plants.

To successfully create butterfly habitat in your garden, do not use synthetic pesticides (which include herbicides, fungicides, etc.) as these are toxic to butterflies.

**Larval Host Plants**

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**Butterfly Species**

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<tr>
<th>Monarch</th>
<th>Eastern fritillary</th>
<th>Mourning cloak</th>
<th>Baltimore butterfly</th>
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<tr>
<td>Acanthoscelides omphalodes</td>
<td>A. cardamines</td>
<td>A. stathmopodion</td>
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**Recommended References**


- Additional information about the North American Native Plant Society can be found at: [http://www.acorn-online.com/hedge/cws.html](http://www.acorn-online.com/hedge/cws.html)

**Native Perennials to Attract Nectar-Seeking Adult Butterflies**

- **Bergamot** (Monarda didyma): Tubular lavender flowers from July to August. Grows 90-120 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- **Black-eyed Susan** (Rudbeckia hirta): Bright yellow blooms from June until frost. Grows 60-90 cm in most soil types. Full sun to light shade.
- **Blazing star** (Liatris spp.): Distinctive flower spike covered in purple flowers from July to August. Grows 30-150 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- **Evening primrose** (Oenothera biennis): Prolific spring azure, mottled duskywing from July to September. Grows 120-150 cm in most soil types. Full sun to light shade.
- **Joe-pye weed** (Eupatorium maculatum): Dense clusters of pinky purple flowers from July to August. Grows 120-180 cm, prefers moist soil but will also do well in average conditions. Full sun to light shade.
- **New England aster** (Aster novae-angliae): Nightshade yellow flowers in late summer through fall. Grows 120-150 cm, prefers moist soil but will also do well in average conditions. Full sun to light shade.
- **Ox-eye daisy** (Helianthus annus): Showy yellow flowers from July to September. Grows 90-150 cm in most soil types. Full sun.
- **Swamp milkweed** (Asclepias incarnata): Purple-pink, fragrant flower clusters from June to August. Grows 120 cm, prefers moist soil but will also do well in average conditions. Full sun.
- **Turtlehead** (Chelone glabra): Intriguing white flowers, which look like open-mouthed turtles in profile, bloom from August to October. Grows 90 cm, prefers moist soil. Full sun to partial shade.

**RECOMMENDED REFERENCES**

- For more information about the butterfly garden, visit: [http://www.acorn-online.com/hedge/cws.html](http://www.acorn-online.com/hedge/cws.html)

**For more information about the North American Native Plant Society, visit: [http://www.napn.org](http://www.napn.org)**

**WEB SITE:** http://www.acorn-online.com/hedge/cws.html

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