



NEWSPAPER ARTICLES

Attracting Butterflies to Your Garden (April 23, 2022)

by Tulare/Kings Counties Master Gardeners

Butterflies are important pollinators, supporting the health of our ecosystem and agriculture. Plus, they're beautiful to look at and relaxing to watch as they flit from flower to flower.

Butterflies, in general, are experiencing a significant decline, especially the Western Monarch. Once, the Monarchs overwintered along our Pacific coast by the millions, but in 2021, the Thanksgiving Monarch population count was less than 200,000.

Many issues attribute to the decline of butterflies, among them stressors such as habitat loss, pesticides, and climate change. It's important to us as gardeners to help all pollinators along.

Here are some general tips on how to create an appealing area and a safe haven for butterflies.



Grow brightly colored plants in a sunny place. In addition to the color palette, we receive when planting flowers in our landscape, a delightful reward is had when a beautiful, iridescent butterfly visits our space. By choosing plants butterflies prefer and putting them in sunny places, we have the opportunity to see them land on a flower to sip the sweet nectar provided by that plant.

In early spring, the following drought-tolerant plants attract butterflies: yellow bush sunflower, red buckwheat, and purple coyote mint (a native). Drought tolerant ground covers that attract butterflies include Bearberry and Rockrose, available in many colors, from pink to rose to purple. Blanket Flower (*Gaillardia*) is a "plant, and ignore" kind of perennial that attracts sulfurs, whites, and swallowtail butterflies.

Grow plants that have blooms rich in nectar. There is a reason the *Buddleia's* common name is butterfly bush. In the summer, its beautiful fragrant flowers of blue, purple or white are usually covered with butterflies. In spring, you may choose water-wise lilacs, which need occasional watering once established, or common yarrow (a native), both of which come in a variety of colors. For purple flowers, try Mexican heather, which requires a little more water, or drought-tolerant lavenders and coneflowers. A few possibilities for this area during the summer include yellow coreopsis, daisies, marigolds, and blue mist bluebeard, a shrub that has blue flowers in late summer.

Plants that prefer light shade need little water and attract butterflies are monkeyflowers (a native) and Shasta daisies. Select late bloomers like asters and chrysanthemums to extend your viewing time. Painted Ladies butterflies feed on cosmos, hollyhock, and Apricot Mallow. And don't forget butterfly weed (*Asclepias*), which is both a food source for the monarch and a host plant that provides food for their caterpillars. Butterfly weed also attracts many other butterflies and skippers. You can use resources like Master Gardeners' plant lists and the Sunset Western Garden Book to investigate more choices.



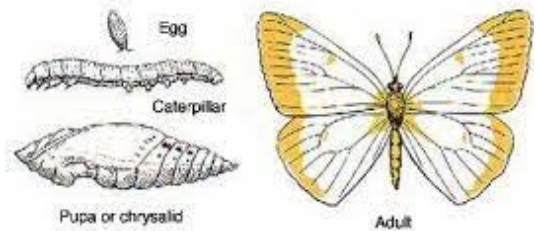
Grow plants in a variety of sizes and colors. Some butterflies desire a variety of species. They are attracted to red, orange, yellow, and purple. If you create large swaths of color, it will be easier for the butterflies to find your garden. Provide places of protection, especially from the wind. Protection may come in the form of butterfly houses, which are similar to birdhouses. However, their openings are slotted rather than round. These can be purchased through gardening supply catalogs or online.

Provide some mud puddles so that butterflies may sip from them to supplant their diet with salts and minerals naturally found in the soil. If you place flat rocks in a sunny location, you may observe butterflies warming themselves in the morning and resting.

There are many natural predators that prey on butterflies. Animals such as birds, spiders, and lizards are a few enemies of butterflies. Insecticides that kill pests will also kill your butterflies. If you feel the need to reduce the pests in your garden, using insecticidal soap, handpicking pests off the plants, or using beneficial insects will provide a safer habitat for butterflies. Integrated Pest Management information found at:

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu> offers details on these methods.

Providing food for the larval stage of the butterfly is important. Butterflies have a life cycle that includes four stages: egg, larva, pupa, and adult. The female selects a plant upon which she lays an egg. The caterpillar emerges to chew and chomp through the host plant, and eventually, the larva changes into a pupa or chrysalis. What was once a worm-like creature emerges from the pupa case as a winged, colorful and lovely insect that seemingly drifts through the air.



However, butterflies do not travel aimlessly. They have targets: their food supply. The proboscis is the long, coiled tongue of the butterfly. This organ is used for lapping up nectar. Because of this, butterflies need flowers shaped in such a way that the nectar they need is easily obtained.

These winged darlings of the garden do not bite, sting, chase or harm anything. They are wonderful pollinators that flit from bloom to bloom. Find a butterfly that you want to attract. Field guides may help you identify the many species of butterflies that inhabit our landscapes through the warm weather months. If you provide the correct food, shelter and a safe place for them, you will not have to travel far to be a butterfly watcher.

The Master Gardeners will be available to answer your questions at a few select locations in the next few months!

Visalia Farmer's Market- 1st & 3rd Saturdays, 8-11 am, 2100 W. Caldwell Ave (behind Sears)

Ace Hardware, Visalia - 1st Sat./every month, 10 am-1 pm

Luis Nursery, Visalia - 2nd Sat./every month, 10 am-2 pm

Questions? Call us:

Call us: Master Gardeners in Tulare County: (559) 684-3325, Tues & Thurs, 9:30-11:30;

Kings County: (559) 852-2736, Thursday Only, 9:30-11:30 a.m

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