



Fascinating Butterflies!
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The life cycle of a butterfly is made up of four parts: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis) and adult. Once a caterpillar is fully grown, it attaches itself to a twig or leaf before shedding its outside layer of skin to reveal the chrysalis beneath, which is made of a hardened protein. After a butterfly emerges from a chrysalis, it waits for a few hours for its wings to fill with blood, dry, and warm up, before taking its first flight. A butterfly is a cold-blooded creature. Unable to regulate its body temperature internally, it is reliant on the external thermal temperature for its muscle motors to function properly. A butterfly cannot fly if its body temperature is less than 82-86 degrees Fahrenheit.

It is estimated that there are between 17,000 and 24,000 species of butterflies in the world, including 750 species in the United States. Depending on the species, a butterfly's average lifespan is between two days and one month, although some species can live up to 14 months. Butterflies come in a variety of colors and sizes, from 1/8" to 12" from wingtip to wingtip. They have two fore and two hind wings, two antennae, six legs, and two compound eyes that see colors and distinguish ultraviolet and polarized light. Many butterflies can taste with their feet! This may help them choose a leaf to lay their eggs on, so caterpillars have a food source after hatching.

Depending on the species, a butterfly's migration pattern can involve thousands of miles, a complex navigation system, one to four generations, and thousands of participants flying at high altitudes. Some butterflies have been observed flying at heights of up to 20,000 feet! Estimates gauge butterfly flight speed at 5-37 miles per hour, depending on the species.

An adult butterfly feeds via its proboscis, a tube-like tongue that sucks up flower nectar, juice from rotten fruit, sweat or liquid animal waste. Many species use flower nectar as their main food source, but there are not a lot of nutrients in flower nectar. To obtain the salts, amino acids and minerals they need, butterflies (primarily males) alight on moist, sandy areas or muddy spots. This is known as puddling. The nutrients they drink in are transferred to females during mating, and the females use them to reproduce and lay eggs.

7/29/2020

Many species of butterflies are disappearing, due to chemical use and loss of natural habitat. Having a butterfly garden in your yard is one of the best ways to save the butterflies. The two types of plants you will need are nectar plants that butterflies feed on, and host plants that butterflies lay their eggs on, and that their caterpillars like to eat. It is easy to find nectar and host plants that will thrive in your area. Try to offer several types that bloom in late summer and early fall, because this is when butterflies are the most numerous. Most importantly, refrain from using chemicals and insecticides in your butterfly garden. Butterflies are extremely sensitive, and many chemicals will kill them.

If you follow these few tips, and find the right plants for your garden, you will help save butterflies and have a wonderful place in your yard to enjoy all season long. For more fascinating butterfly information, check the references below, and stay tuned for more articles in upcoming issues of the Mountain Democrat.

References:

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Additionally, Master Gardeners invite you to a public tour of the Sherwood Garden Demonstration Garden, a collection of 16 themed gardens, including a butterfly garden! The tour starts at 9 AM this Saturday, August 1. The garden is located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville. See more information about the garden below.

Currently we are in phase 2 resumption of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future be limited. Please see our calendar of events for learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by County residents and we

7/29/2020

especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge.

We do have some good news--the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public, from 9 AM to noon on Fridays and Saturdays. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the "Ask a Master Gardener" option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We'll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see <http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener-e-news>.