



How to Create a Butterfly Garden
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Why plant a butterfly garden? As discussed in *Fascinating Butterflies* in the July 29 issue of *Mountain Democrat*, many species of butterflies are disappearing due to chemical use and loss of natural habitat, but you can help save them by planting a butterfly garden. It can be any size, from a few small pots or a window box to a large section of your yard, but be sure to include the components listed below to support the complete butterfly life cycle. And most importantly, refrain from using chemicals and insecticides, as butterflies are extremely sensitive to chemicals, and many toxins will kill them.

The life cycle of a butterfly is made up of four parts: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa (chrysalis) and adult. An adult butterfly feeds on flower nectar, juice from rotten fruit, sweat or liquid animal waste. Although many species use flower nectar as their main food source, they get the salts, amino acids and minerals they need by alighting on moist, sandy areas or mud. This is called puddling.

With this in mind, here is what to provide to sustain butterflies' complete life cycle:

Sun: Locate your butterfly garden where plants can receive plenty of sunlight, so butterflies will be able to warm themselves in sunshine.

Nectar plants: Most adult butterflies feed only in the sun, so your key nectar sources should be planted where they will receive mid-morning to mid-afternoon sunshine. Perennials like sedums, yarrow, salvias, daylilies, bee balm, coneflower and lantana will draw butterflies to your garden. Other excellent nectar sources are milkweed, butterfly bush, lilac, ironweed, Queen Anne's lace and geranium. Try a mixture of perennials, annuals and shrubs.

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Color and continuity: Adult butterflies are attracted to red, yellow, orange, pink and purple blossoms, flat-topped or clustered, with short flower tubes. They need a constant source of nectar throughout the adult phase of their lifespan, so select and plant for continuous blooms. It is best to plant species that bloom in late summer and early fall, because this is when butterflies are the most numerous.

Host plants: A butterfly garden needs to provide host plants on which butterflies will lay eggs. Young caterpillars then feed on the host plants until they pupate and become adult butterflies. First, you will need to determine which species of butterflies are in your area. Then decide which host plants belong in your garden. Online information and your local nursery can help with this.

A puddling spot: Choose a location that gets shade or early-morning sun but does not get hot in the afternoon. Place a shallow pan or dish on a pedestal or wall to keep it off the ground. Fill the dish with natural sand, mix in a small amount of organic manure, add a few smooth rocks as resting spots, and sprinkle a small amount of organic sea salt on the sand mixture. Keep the sand damp, so butterflies can extract minerals from it, but do not let the water pool in the dish. Sprinkle a small amount of salt on top of the sand mixture every few weeks.

A feeder: Hang a paper plate from a tree, preferably in the shade. Add a few slices of rotting fruit (bananas, oranges, strawberries, or watermelon). Keep the dish clean and free from mold.

A place to rest: Butterflies need sun for orientation, and to warm their wings for flight. Place flat stones around your garden so they can rest and bask in the sun. But stones absorb heat, so make sure to place them where butterflies can get morning sun, but not blazing afternoon rays.

A seating area: Whether you want to sit in the midst of your butterfly garden or you prefer to watch from the sidelines, a seating area will allow you to comfortably enjoy your visiting butterflies. Choose a spot that will give you a good view and will provide some shade for you, too.

By following these tips, including the right host and nectar plants for your garden, and adding a puddler and a feeder, you will help save butterflies and create a wonderful place in your yard to enjoy all season long.

References

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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 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](http://ucanr.edu/mastergardener-e-news).