

Flying colors

Butterflies are enchanting in the garden. Their graceful, fluttering movements add a sparkle to the plants. Plant a butterfly garden and you will be delighted all summer long.

Besides the well-known monarch butterfly, there are over 200 different butterfly species that may be found in the Midwestern United States. Butterfly gardens will also attract other nectar-feeding animals. These include hummingbirds, honeybees, bumblebees and moths.

It's easy to attract butterflies—just give them what they want. Noted fairy tale author Hans Christian Anderson once wrote, "Just living is not enough," said the butterfly, "one must have sunshine, freedom, and a little flower." That's not too hard.

Select a sunny site for your butterfly garden. Make sure it is sheltered from harsh winds. Locate the garden in a place where you will be able to watch the butterflies easily.

Free-roaming butterflies love to sunbathe. You can make resting spots for butterflies by plac-

ing dark rocks in the garden or exposing some soil; these dark surfaces will absorb the warm rays of the sun. Grass stems to perch upon are also inviting.


It is critical that you limit pesticide use near the garden to an absolute minimum. Chemicals that kill insect pests will also kill butterflies. Limit your use of pesticides to insecticidal soaps, barriers, traps, and other methods that do not leave toxic chemical residues.

The plants you select for the garden and surrounding landscape will make a big difference. You need to provide two types of food for butterflies: plant tissue for when they are caterpillars, and nectar sources for when they have matured into winged adults.

Landscape trees and shrubs may be used to provide food for the leaf-eating caterpillars. Recommended plants include birch, cherry, butterfly bush, oak, hackberry, plum, sweet mockorange, viburnum, and willow.

Other good food sources for caterpillars include such perennials as clover, Kentucky bluegrass, little bluestem, aster, and hollyhock.

For adult butterflies, plant different flowers to make nectar available throughout spring, summer, and fall. Butterflies are generally attracted to purple, orange, yellow or red flowers. Recommended annual flowers include alyssum, cleome, cosmos, dianthus, nasturtium, petunia, verbena, and zinnia. Recommended perennials include blazing star, butterfly bush, columbine, gladiolus, peony, phlox, purple coneflower, sedum, stiff goldenrod, and yarrow.

Among herbs, dill, lavender, lemon balm, marjoram, parsley, peppermint, rosemary, sage, and thyme are good selections. 

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