

Butterfly Gardens

Butterflies are living garden ornaments that add joy to time spent in the garden. When I see a butterfly enjoying nectar from my summer flowers my spirits soar and I feel all is right with the world. Children from the neighborhood stop by to watch the butterflies dart about in the sunshine. What a wonderful reward for spending a few hours planting flowers.

I have been gardening in Angelina County for seven years and have enjoyed watching swallowtails, monarchs, and skippers feeding on lantana, blue salvia and Mexican sage. When I planted zinnias last year the butterflies enjoyed their brilliant colors. I provided a perfect butterfly habitat by simply planting flowers that bloom through our summer heat until frost. I must confess the butterflies were an added bonus and one I didn't plan!

To entice butterflies to your yard you need to provide host plants for the adult butterflies to lay eggs. The caterpillars will eat foliage from these plants while they develop from larva to butterfly. Host plants in our area can include cannas, parsley, dill, rosemary, thistles and butterfly weed. Do not use any chemical or biological pesticides in your garden. Since the foliage may be unattractive after it's eaten place these plants in the back of the garden.

Place the flower garden against a fence, house or a row of bushes to provide protection from strong winds. Choose flowers like lantana, blue salvia, scarlet sage, butterfly weed and purple coneflower that bloom until frost to provide a steady source of nectar. Butterflies will find the flowers more easily if each variety of flowers is grouped together in masses. Color is also important and butterflies prefer strong colors such as

orange, yellow, purple and red. Since butterflies are attracted to fragrance choose flowers that have the heaviest perfume. Many of the older varieties have more fragrance than the newer hybrids.

Fire ants are predators of caterpillars so they will need to be controlled in and around the garden. Any of the fire ant baits on the market may be used according to package directions.

Butterflies need a source of shallow water. Fill a large flowerpot saucer with water and place it on the ground in your garden. A few small rocks may be added to the saucer to provide resting places. Change the water daily to prevent mosquitoes from breeding.

By following these simple steps you will soon see fluttering butterflies in your home garden. Enjoy!

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1. Butterfly gardens are fun for the gardener, family, neighborhood
2. Butterflies—characteristics:
 - Female chooses place to lay eggs
 - Caterpillars feed voraciously
 - Develop into Chrysalis'
 - Butterfly emerges
3. Adult butterflies
 - Feed with proboscis
 - Nearsighted –recognize bright colors and scent
 - Need warmth to fly
 - Need shelter from wind
 - Shade to rest in cool temperatures and cool off during heat
 - Can only drink liquids—drink nectar, water from puddles, raindrops, fluids from rotting fruit and carrion
 - Enjoy resting on flat flowers
 - Need cover from predators
4. What butterflies need: place to lay eggs, food source for caterpillars, nectar for adults, water, protection from wind & fire ants, place to warm their wings

5. Attracted to bright colors and fragrance
6. Flowers with flat surfaces to rest on
7. Flowers that bloom all season
8. Don't use pesticides
9. Leave a few weeds around property
10. Water in puddles
11. Herbs
12. Preparing a bed: generally well drained soil: raise bed with extra topsoil, add organic matter and all purpose fertilizer for flower beds; work soil to depth of several inches; plan how you will water it—soaker hoses
13. Plants for our area: perennials
- 14.
- 15.

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Everyone loves butterflies. Isn't that a true statement? I think butterflies, like birds and hummingbirds, are an extra gift for spending time in your garden. With their brightly colored wings darting from flower to flower they lift our spirits. It's hard to be in a bad mood when you are observing the beautiful handiwork of the Creator.

I began butterfly gardening a few years ago unintentionally. I wanted plants that would provide color in our landscape through the hot dry summers. I planted lantana because I had observed how well it did in landscapes all around Lufkin the first summer we arrived. I added blue salvia because and Mexican sage I liked the color combination of blue, purple and yellow. I planted some cleome and zinnia from seed for cut flowers. Pesticides I always used sparingly and we lived next to an empty lot with native plants and trees. I had also planted an herb garden that included rosemary, mint and dill. I had provided all the things that butterflies need: a food source for caterpillars, water that puddle in a low spot, a variety of flowers that bloom all season, shelter from wind.

About butterflies:

The female butterfly looks for the right plant on which to lay her eggs. She does this by sight and touching plants with her feet to "taste" to see if she had found the right plant. Each variety of butterfly looks for specific plants on which to lay eggs. These plants are *host plants*. For example, the monarch lays her eggs on the milkweed or

butterfly weed. The noxious chemicals from the plant make the caterpillars repulsive to predators. The caterpillar from the Swallowtail feeds on foliage of Queen Anne's lace, parsley or carrots. She will usually lay her eggs on the underside of leaves. Soon the eggs hatch and caterpillars will be happily munching away on the leaves; caterpillars feed almost constantly because they have a lot of growing to do. Caterpillars have chewing mouthparts and can completely defoliate portions of the host plant. They will grow 4 to 6 times before they pupate or change into a chrysalis. They are immobile inside the chrysalis and often disguise themselves to look like their environment to protect themselves from predators. Some butterflies may over winter in your yard in the chrysalis stage. They undergo a complete metamorphosis to become a butterfly.

Butterflies generally will lay their eggs in small numbers while crop pests will be many in number, even hatching in the hundreds. To have a butterfly garden you need to get used to damage to the foliage of your host plants. You are working in partnership with the butterflies. Be aware if you apply pesticides to your host plants you will be poisoning your caterpillars and future butterflies. However, there are crop pests that also develop into butterflies. You may not be willing to give up your broccoli and cabbage to the cabbageworms even though they develop into white butterflies. You may want to use a product like Bt to control the amount of damage that caterpillars do on your vegetable crops. Reserve an area for butterflies where you do not use insecticides.

Adult butterflies feed with mouth parts shaped like a long, coiled tube, or proboscis. This means they can only take in flower nectar, water from puddles, and fluids from rotting fruit and even carrion. They prefer to land on flowers to sip the nectar. They can't burrow into a deep flower like a bee in a hibiscus bloom. Butterflies

are nearsighted so large groups of flowers are more effective in attracting them than a single flower. They also have a good sense of smell from their antennae. So—plant groups of the same, brightly colored flower. Also, fragrant flowers will attract butterflies.

How do you design a landscape for butterflies? Use a wide variety of plants; herbs, annuals, perennials, vines groundcovers shrubs and trees. Have flowers blooming from early spring to frost. The more kinds of plants you have the greater the number and varieties of butterflies that will visit your property.

Leave part of your property or nearby areas natural and weedy so female butterflies will have plants on which to lay their eggs. Most butterflies will spend the winter in your yard: as eggs, chrysalises, or larvae; some adults hibernate. Don't mow these weedy spots during the winter. Larval host plants include Bermuda grass, hollyhock, marigold, milkweed, nettles, thistles, parsley, snapdragon, sorrel, St. Augustine grass and violet.

Our challenge in our area is to plant flowers that will bloom consistently through our hot and often dry summers. There is still time to plant flowers that will attract butterflies this year and there are many heat tolerant varieties at our local nurseries.

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Planning a landscape for butterflies

- Use a wide variety of plants: herbs, annuals, perennials, vines, groundcovers, shrubs and trees
- Caterpillar host plants include Bermuda & St. Augustine grass, hollyhock, marigold, milkweed, nettles, thistle, parsley, snapdragon, sorrel, yarrow, Queen Anne's lace, cannas & numerous other weeds, trees, herbs & flowers
- Have flowers blooming from early spring to frost
- Plant brightly colored, scented flowers in large masses
- Plant flowers near sources of cover and shelter from wind: shrubs, trees, wall or fence
- Leave part of your property or nearby areas natural and weedy
- Provide sources of water (even "mud puddles") especially in the dry times of year
- Use minimal amounts of insecticides; but do control fire ants with baits

Planting a butterfly garden this month

- Raise the bed up with a few inches of extra topsoil. Add organic matter such as compost, cow manure, mulch and work it in. Use general purpose fertilizer according to package directions
- Container gardens, such as hanging baskets and large pots may also be used. Just remember they will need to be watered often, usually daily.
- Plan how you will water—drip irrigation, soaker hoses, sprinkler system, or sprinkler. Your plants will need to be watered consistently until roots are well established. Best time to water is in the morning.
- Choose plants that will bloom through our hot summer that are brightly colored and have open blooms.
- Use a mix of perennials and annuals.

Plants to be planted now

These are suggestions and not a complete list. These are plants that I have used successfully or have seen mentioned in my research.

- Annuals: Cosmos, Globe Amaranth, Impatiens, Marigold, Pentas and Zinnia. Many of these will self-seed the second year. Cosmos, Globe Amaranth and Zinnias may still be sown from seeds. Petunias—use the varieties that will bloom through our summer such as the old-fashioned or "Wave" varieties.
- Perennials: Asters, Butterfly bush (buddleia), Butterfly Weed, Coneflowers, Coreopsis, Lantana, Mexican Sage, Salvia. Protect roots with mulch this fall and they will be back next year.
- Tropicals: Bougainvillea, Hibiscus. Plant in containers and bring indoors next fall.

Zinnias

