

How to Attract Butterflies to Gardens

Attract Butterflies to Gardens with Nectar for Annuals, Perennials, and Plants Butterfly Larvae Eat

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Butterflies are so fascinating to watch that people immediately pause to see them whenever they appear over their yards. Most of the time, however, butterflies fly away nearly as quickly as they appear. When this happens, their hasty departures leave fascinated gardeners and other onlookers hungry to explore more butterfly wing flapping. Butterfly fans want to see close up views of butterfly wing patterns, lengthy antennas, and small little faces.

The problem is butterflies need certain types of plants to survive. In order to attract butterflies and keep them in their gardens, gardens must offer two kinds of plants. One type must provide nectar for “mature” butterflies and other kind must provide food for butterfly “larvae.” When butterflies enter yards wherein gardens do not provide nectar-producing plants for adult butterflies or do not offer plants that sustain butterfly larval needs, butterflies must continue their journeys until they find gardens that grow plants needed to support both butterfly stages.

What this means is that gardeners wanting to capture the attention of butterflies in order to keep butterflies living in their gardens must grow plants that (1) attract butterflies and (2) nourish butterflies. For centuries, flowers and butterflies have worked together to ensure flowers are pollinated and butterflies are nourished through a process

called “mutualism”. All gardeners need to do to create mutualism conditions in their yards is plant the right plants to instigate the butterfly-flower relationship.

Butterflies Help Plants Grow:

Attracting butterflies to gardens can be good for plants as well as for butterflies. While landing on plant after plant to consume nectar, butterflies, like honeybees, assist in transferring pollen from one flower to another. You could say that butterflies pay flowers for nectar – their primary food source – by pollinating flowers.

Butterfly Larvae May Annihilate Useful Plants

It is important to note that some plants that attract butterflies, and provide them resources to lay eggs, might be plants gardeners find useful. Butterflies need these plants just the same, however, because only certain types of plants possess the mix of nutrients hatching butterfly larvae need to survive.

Despite potential conflict, many gardeners who also have fascinations for butterflies do not avoid growing useful plants that attract butterflies, and in fact, gardeners willing to “sacrifice” a few useful plants as butterfly larvae offerings improve their chances of keeping butterflies in their gardens. The sacrificial factor is discussed below under “Feeding Butterfly Larvae”.

Plants that Attract Butterflies:

Plants such as asters, marigolds, and petunias are great for attracting butterflies. Flowers from each of these three plants produce nectar for butterflies to eat. Mixing these three particular flowering plants in gardens intended to attract butterflies is ideal for keeping butterflies in butterfly gardens throughout the year because asters are perennials, petunias are perennials (though often grown as

annuals), and marigolds are annuals. Since butterflies love nectar-producing plants, including both annuals and perennials in gardens reinforces butterfly attractability.

Heights of Butterfly Attracting Plants:

Another factor to consider when choosing plants that attract butterflies is plant height. Including plants with varying heights such as six-inch plants, twelve inch plants, and three foot plants, increases chances of making gardens attractive to butterflies because butterflies receive more space to maneuver up and down while hovering.

When considering height ranges of the annuals and perennials previously mentioned, their heights are Marigolds six inches to four feet, Petunias fifteen inches to twenty-seven inches, and Asters six inches to five feet. Actual growing sizes will depend on individual types of plants i.e. gardeners could choose New England Asters, New York Asters, or Italian Asters. Sizes of these asters vary from three to five feet, three feet, and two feet, respectively.

Feeding Butterfly Larvae:

As stated earlier, growers must include plants that butterfly larvae can eat. Butterflies and butterfly larvae do not necessarily eat the same kinds of plants. Butterflies mostly eat nectar from flowering plants. Butterfly larvae eat plant leaves, seeds, and other plant parts mostly from other than flowering plants. For this reason, butterflies have less motivation or rationale to remain in gardens that do not provide both types of plants.

Many plants that attract butterflies by coaxing them to lay eggs are types of plants gardeners usually grow to feed themselves. These plants include tomatoes, broccoli, and cabbages. Some butterfly larvae also feed on certain biennials and perennials. Biennials and perennials attractive to egg bearing butterflies include polygonum, knotweed, partridge

peas, and common hops (*humulus lupulus*).

Gardeners could opt to grow herb gardens to attract butterflies and provide housing for butterfly larvae. Egg bearing butterflies are happy for the availability of herbs such as parsley, dill, fennel, and chives to feed their young.

Food Butterflies and Butterfly Larvae Agree On:

Another strategy gardeners hoping to attract butterflies can use is to allow clover to grow in out-of-the-way areas of their yards. Clovers are types of plants adult butterflies and offspring butterfly larvae both eat. This means that opting to grow clover could be a win-win-win situation because larvae could consume crops for which gardeners have no use leaving gardeners to sacrifice less plants they do find of use and butterflies could eat nectar from the same plants as their young.

In conclusion, gardeners wishing to grow plants that attract butterflies must assure plants they select can supply the essentials butterflies need to sustain their lives as well as nourish their larvae. If larvae feeding plants do not exist in otherwise attractive gardens, butterflies will fly elsewhere to lay eggs on plants that can sustain the young. Growing plants of varying heights makes gardens more butterfly friendly. Growing plants that bloom at different times keeps butterflies around longer by providing nectar.

Oh... And one more thing. Some of the most butterfly sustainable plants are plants that produce several florets per flower. More florets mean more nectar to feed butterflies.

Following is a list of other types of plants gardeners can grow to attract butterflies: Daisies, Black-Eyed Susan, *Schizanthus Pinnatus*, Impatiens, Privets, Sunflowers, Blueberries, Chrysanthemums, Lilacs, and Phlox.