

Butterfly Gardens



Throughout time and across cultures, people have regarded butterflies as symbols of rebirth. They go through several life phases, help pollinate many flowers, and some move across vast expanses of land. Follow the tips below to entice these enchanting creatures to your garden.

- Choose a sunny, sheltered location. Cold-blooded butterflies need warm temperatures to fly and feed. Place a flat rock in a sunny area as a basking spot for butterflies to warm themselves on.
- Include a diversity of plants that are native to your region. These plants have evolved over thousands of years in response to the local climate, and in association with other native species. Native plants of exceptional importance to butterflies are listed on the back of this sheet.
- Include larval (caterpillar) host plants such as those listed on the back. Do not worry about caterpillars killing your plants. They are generally quite specific in their food choices, and their host plants have adapted to tolerate their feeding.
- Select plants with bright, fragrant flowers that are tubular or flat-topped. These flower types are easier for adult butterflies to feed from with their long 'tongue' called a proboscis. A list of nectar plants is included on the back.
- Create mud puddles in the garden. Butterflies use these as a source of water and nutrients. A small area of exposed soil in the garden is the perfect spot.
- Avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers in your garden. Butterflies and caterpillars are very sensitive to these products. Even the smallest amounts can be deadly.

Butterflies have four distinctly different life stages in their development: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa and adult. In addition, larvae shed their skin several times as they grow. Each stage of this growth is referred to as an instar. In the final instar, a caterpillar's skin hardens into a protective chrysalis around the pupa. If you find a caterpillar hanging in a J shape, it is preparing to pupate.



A Selection of Native Plants for your Butterfly Garden

Native plants form the foundation of our ecosystems. They co-evolved with, and are connected to, native animals, fungi and microbes. Some of these plants are moisture loving, others need drier soils. Choose plants that suit your soil conditions.

Aster species 🦋
Bee Balm 🦋
Big Bluestem 🦋
Birch species 🦋
Black-eyed Susan 🦋
Blue Grama Grass 🦋
Blue Vervain 🦋

Blazing Star 🦋
Butterfly Weed 🦋
Common Milkweed 🦋
Dogwood species 🦋
Goldenrod species 🦋
Grey-headed Coneflower 🦋
New Jersey Tea 🦋

Pale Purple Coneflower 🦋
Pearly Everlasting 🦋
Poplar species 🦋
Showy Tick-trefoil 🦋
Spicebush 🦋
Spotted Joe-pye Weed 🦋
Swamp Milkweed 🦋

Turtlehead 🦋
Wild Bergamot 🦋
Willow species 🦋

🦋 – larval host
🦋 – nectar source

Many popular non-native garden plants also host caterpillars and provide nectar to butterflies. Examples include the herbs lavender, fennel and parsley, and the annual flowers nasturtium, cosmos, alyssum and zinnia.

All about caterpillars

- Caterpillars have powerful jaws that rarely stop chewing.
- Every species of caterpillar has specific types of plants that it will consume, and will face starvation if these plants are not available.
- Many caterpillars use mimicry or camouflage to protect themselves from predators. The Tiger Swallowtail caterpillar has false eyes on its head to frighten away predators, while the White Admiral caterpillar is mottled grey and white to resemble bird droppings.
- Bright colouring is also a defence. The black, white and orange stripes of a Monarch caterpillar warn of its bad taste.
- Caterpillars often adorn spikes, hairs or bumps, which make them hard to swallow.

All about butterflies

- Butterfly wings are covered with tiny scales, like roof shingles, and range in colour and patterns. These patterns may help with protection from predators and/or location of a mate.
- Butterflies have taste sensors in their feet that help them to locate nectar sources and larval host plants. They feed on nectar through a straw-like tongue (proboscis) that coils up when not in use.
- Despite their fragile appearance, some butterflies are able to travel great distances. Monarchs migrate as far as Mexico.
- The length of time a butterfly lives varies. Some live only a few weeks, while others, like the Mourning Cloak, may live for months because they overwinter as adults.
- Though closely related, moths and butterflies differ in several ways.
 - Butterflies are active in the daytime, while moths are nocturnal.
 - Most moths rest with their wings out flat, where butterflies hold their wings upright.
 - Butterflies have clubs on the end of their antennae, while moths do not.



Mourning Cloak

Additional resources

- [Butterfly Gardening: Creating Summer Magic in your Garden](#) by Thomas Emmel, 1999
- Canadian Wildlife Federation - Wild About Gardening www.wildaboutgardening.org
- [Stokes Butterfly Book](#) by Donald Stokes, 1991
- [The Butterflies of Canada](#) by Peter Hall, 1998
- Toronto Entomologist Association www.ontarioinsects.org
- [100 Easy-to-Grow Native Plants for Canadian Gardens](#) by Lorraine Johnson, 1999

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