

Butterfly garden factsheet

Butterfly Garden

It's easy to love butterflies. They are simply delightful insects that bring lightness and happiness to a garden. But it's easy to forget they are also an important part of the biodiversity of our environment, with a role in pollinating plants and providing important sources of food to other native animals.



Butterflies and their larvae (caterpillars) are linked closely with specific plants and the loss of a particular plant species from an area is often means the disappearance of the butterfly species dependent on that plant. Planting a garden aimed at providing food, shelter and nesting sites for butterflies is one way to ensure we keep our beautiful butterflies!

How to do it:

There are four main requirements for a successful butterfly garden. These are:

Warmth

Pick a warm, sunny spot for your garden. Butterflies are cold blooded and depend upon the heat from the sun to warm up their wings and bodies for flying. Incorporating rocks in your garden is also a good idea as butterflies will be able to rest and sun themselves on these rocks.

Shelter

Like all animals butterflies need shelter from weather. Plant some sturdy shrubs that butterflies can hide in. They will also require shelter from predators to feed and lay eggs.

Food

Different plants will attract different types of butterflies. In addition, butterflies need different foods at different stages of their lifecycle so a range of food plants should be planted. You will need plants that provide food for the caterpillars (larval host plants) and also plants which provide nectar for adult butterflies. Larval host plants are critical for a successful butterfly garden as they will persuade the butterflies to stay and lay eggs. Growing a variety of plants is the best way to ensure that a reliable food source is available throughout the year. Check with your local nursery or council about what plants will be suitable for a successful butterfly garden in your area.

Water

Believe it or not, butterflies prefer to drink their water from muddy pools! Drinking muddy water gives them much needed salt and minerals. When creating your garden, provide a moist shallow area in the dirt for butterflies to drink from or add a handful of dirt to a bird-bath or shallow dish.

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Finally, you will need to go organic in your butterfly garden – don't spray or bugs with pesticides as you'll kill your butterflies!

Plant selection

Where possible, choose native plants as these are suited to our natural environment, including soil, climate and native animals. Check with your nursery about what plants might be suitable.

Many exotic plants also attract butterflies. Plants such as Butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*), Queen Anne's Lace (*Ammi majus*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) and salvia and sage (*Salvia* species) are also very attractive to butterflies.

Note: Planting a garden for butterflies means planting a garden full of flowers. These flowers will also attract bees which – depending on proximity to playing areas – should be a consideration for your school or centre.

