



Gardening to Attract Butterflies

A butterfly garden can be a great source of delight when it attracts these beautiful visitors, and the plantings may help conserve native butterfly species. Nectar and food plant sources within expanding urban areas can contribute to the prosperity of our local butterflies.

Planning Your Garden

A suitable site for butterflies has three basic requirements: full sun, shelter from wind, heavy rain or other adverse weather conditions, and a source of water. If you want butterflies to live in your garden, you will need to supply plants that serve as food for immature butterflies (caterpillars), as well those that provide nectar and pollen for adults.

Encourage Caterpillars

Because caterpillars consume plants, you must be willing to accept some damage to ornamental plant hosts. Do not use any insecticides in your butterfly garden. In addition to harming the caterpillars, many insecticides will also hurt adult butterflies. Consider siting the caterpillars' food plants in a less visible spot of the yard. Place flowers that provide nectar and pollen for adult butterflies in a more prominent location.

Help Butterflies Feel at Home

The best nectar flowers are fragrant, have a long season of bloom, and provide a sequence of bloom throughout the season. You may achieve this by mixing native and exotic plants. Clumped or massed plantings are most effective in attracting butterflies. Simplicity is the key to a satisfying and easily maintained butterfly garden.

Flowers that are flat-topped or clustered provide landing platforms and easy access to nectar. Blossoms with short nectar tubes may be used by a wide range of butterflies. Blue, purple, white, pink, yellow, orange, and red flowers may entice butterflies to your yard. Whether your garden is large or small, a number of attractive choices are available. For details, consult the following lists of butterflies common to Rockland County and plants that appeal to them:

Favorite Butterfly Plants

Perennials

Bee Balm – <i>Monarda didyma</i>	New England Aster – <i>Aster novae-angliae</i>
Black Eyed Susan - <i>Rudbeckia</i> spp.	New York Ironweed – <i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i>
Phlox – <i>Phlox</i> spp. Goldenrod – <i>Solidago</i> spp.	
Cardinal Flower – <i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	Purple Coneflower – <i>Echinacea purpurea</i>
Joe Pye Weed – <i>Eupatorium purpureum</i>	Sedum – <i>Sedum</i> spp.
Milkweed – <i>Asclepias</i> spp.	

Annuals and Tender Perennials

Aster – <i>Aster</i> spp.	Impatiens – <i>Impatiens</i> spp.
Cosmos – <i>Cosmos</i> spp.	Lantana – <i>Lantana</i> spp.
Dahlia – <i>Dahlia</i> spp.	Marigold – <i>Tagetes</i> spp.
Geranium – <i>Pelargonium</i> spp.	Mexican Sunflower – <i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i>
Heliotrope – <i>Heliotropium</i> spp.	Pentas – <i>Pentas lanceolata</i>
Hibiscus, Tropical – <i>Hibiscus rosa-sinensis</i>	Petunia – <i>Petunia</i> spp. hybrids

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Annuals and Tender Perennials, continued

Pinks, Sweet William – <i>Dianthus</i> sp.	Strawflower – <i>Bracteantha bracteata</i>
Salvia – <i>Salvia</i> spp.	Sunflower – <i>Helianthus annuum</i>
Snapdragon – <i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	Verbena – <i>Verbena</i> spp.
Statice – <i>Phylliostachys</i> spp.	Zinnia – <i>Zinnia</i> spp.

Some Rockland County Butterflies

Butterfly	Season	Larval Host Plants	Adult Nectar Plants
American Painted Lady	mid April- October	Borage, Everlastings (Pearly Everlasting), Hollyhock, Wormwood	Aster, Bee Balm, Iberis, Marigold, Mint, Sedum
Black Swallowtail	April- September	Carrot, Dill, Parsley, Queen Anne's Lace, Rue, Wild Parsnip	Butterfly Weed, Clover, Phlox, Thistle
Cabbage White	late March-hard frost	Cabbage, Broccoli, Mustard	Arabis (Rock Cress), Aster, Bee Balm, Dandelion, Mint, Marigold, Mustard
Clouded Sulphur	April- November	Clover	Aster, Clover, Dandelion, Goldenrod, Marigold, Milkweed, Phlox, Tithonia, Zinnia
Eastern Tiger Swallowtail	April- September	Ash, Lilac, Tulip Tree, Sweet Bay, Wild Black Cherry, Willow	Bee Balm, Butterfly Bush, Dandelion, Lilac, Milkweed, Phlox
Great Spangled Fritillary	mid June- September	Violet	Bee Balm, Butterfly Weed, Catmint, Coneflower, Mountain Laurel, Verbena
Monarch	Late May- November	Milkweed	Cosmos, Goldenrod, Joe-Pye Weed, Liatris, Milkweed, Sedum, Tithonia, Zinnia
Mourning Cloak	March-fall	Cottonwood, Elm, Hackberry, Poplar, Willow	Arabis, Butterfly Weed, Plant Sap, Willow
Red Admiral	mid April- October	Hops, Nettle	Aster, Catmint, Iberis, Milkweed, Phlox, Plant Sap
Silver Spotted Skipper	May- September	Black Locust, Wisteria (legumes)	Dogbane, Globe Thistle, Joe-Pye Weed, Liatris, Milkweed, Pentas, Purple Cone Flower, Zinnia
Spicebush Swallowtail	April- September	Sassafras, Spicebush, Sweet Bay, Tulip Tree,	Azalea, Clover, Joe Pye Weed, Milkweed

Complete the Habitat

Butterflies must bask to regulate their body temperature. Provide flat stones throughout the garden where they can rest and absorb sun and heat. Many gardeners also provide a container of wet sand or a muddy puddle where butterflies may obtain salts and mineral-rich liquids.

Resources:

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