Gardening
For
Butterflies

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www.massbutterflies.org – Website for The Massachusetts Butterfly Club. Visit it for butterfly information, pictures for help with identification of Massachusetts butterflies, field trip schedule (free and open to everyone), etc.

BUTTERFLY GARDENING TIPS

There are lots of butterfly gardening books for reference. Sometimes the books are quite overwhelming, with detailed plans that may go beyond budget and manpower. A garden doesn’t have to be big or even well planned to attract butterflies – the right kinds of flowers (not all flowers are nectar sources), some larval host plants, and some attention to the following points should bring success.

A BUTTERFLY GARDEN SHOULD:

- have sunny areas,
- be open with sheltered edges,
- have puddling areas,
- have basking areas (flat rocks),
- have nectar flowers (most important).

NECTAR SOURCE CONSIDERATIONS:

- composite flowers,
- clusters of small flowers,
- fragrant, (day and night!)
- native,
- wildflowers (weeds!).

CHECK BOOKS AND LISTS (be careful of your area)

TRY TO HAVE SOMETHING IN BLOOM ALL THROUGH THE SEASON, ESPECIALLY EARLY AND LATE

KINDS OF THINGS TO PLANT:

- trees,
- shrubs,
- annuals,
- perennials,
- vines,
- LARVAL HOST PLANTS.

Peterson’s First Guide to Caterpillars, Amy B. Wright. Features 120 of the most common species, with illustrations of adult butterflies and moths they become. Pupa, egg, and preferred food plant often shown to help identify caterpillars.
PLANTING CONSIDERATIONS:

- soil,
- drainage,
- height,
- soil conditions,
- bloom time,
- colors,
- MAINTENANCE.

PLANT FLOWERS IN LARGE BUNCHES IF YOU CAN.

WILDFLOWER MEADOWS (you can put one in or you can have an area where you put in some flowers and/or let the “weeds” grow freely.)

DEADHEADING THE FLOWERS:

- annuals (encourage longer bloom time),
- perennials (stop from spreading).

OTHER ATTRACTIONS:

- butterfly feeder (freshen frequently),
- rotting fruit (be careful of other insects),
- hibernation box (don’t bother –these are better for wasp nests than for butterflies!)

BE AWARE OF:

- birds (not really a problem),
- caterpillars (you may want to encourage!),
- PESTICIDES (NO WAY!, DON’T USE!),
- butterfly flying times and life cycles (species differ as to when there are caterpillars and adults)

The Butterfly Book, and Easy Guide to Butterfly Gardening, Identification, and Behavior, Donald and Lillian Stokes and Ernest Williams – Color photos of butterflies in all life stages, and descriptions of the life cycles and behavior of 60+ common North American species. Complete list of nectar source plants as well as listings of larval host plants. Also includes well-illustrated section on caterpillar and adult butterfly identification.

SOME COMMON MASSACHUSETTS BUTTERFLIES AND THEIR CATERPILLAR HOST PLANTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Butterfly</th>
<th>Host Plants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Swallowtail</td>
<td>Carrot, Dill, Parsley, Rue, Queen Anne’s Lace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger Swallowtail</td>
<td>Variety of Trees and Shrubs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spicebush Swallowtail</td>
<td>Sassafras, Spicebush</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cabbage White</td>
<td>Mustards, Cresses, Cabbage, Broccoli</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Copper</td>
<td>Sorrel, Curled Dock</td>
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<tr>
<td>Banded Hairstreak</td>
<td>Oaks, Walnuts, Hickories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Tailed-blue</td>
<td>Legumes, including Clovers and Vetches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Azure</td>
<td>many woody shrubs and trees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great-spangled Fritillary</td>
<td>Violets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearl Crescent</td>
<td>Asters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Mark</td>
<td>Nettles, False Nettle, Am. Elm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Comma</td>
<td>Nettles, False Nettle, Am. Elm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mourning Cloak</td>
<td>Hops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Admiral</td>
<td>Willows, Am. Elm, Aspens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Lady</td>
<td>Nettles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painted Lady</td>
<td>Everlastings, Pussytoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red-spotted Purple</td>
<td>Thistles, Mallows, Everlastings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viceroy</td>
<td>Cherries, Aspens, Apples, Plums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monarch</td>
<td>Willows, Aspens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver-spotted Skipper</td>
<td>Milkweeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skippers</td>
<td>Black Locust, Ground Nut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grasses, Sedges, Others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Butterflies Through Binoculars, A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Eastern North America, Jeffrey Glassberg – Shows how and where to find, identify, and enjoy the species that inhabit the Northeast. Provides photos of living butterflies in their natural poses and in correct size relationship to other species. Uses field marks for species identification and give basic natural histories of each species in highly readable style.

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These lists of plantings were compiled from several sources, and are by no means exclusive. Be sure to take into consideration all the planting issues (amount of sunlight, type of soil, surrounding plants, colors, heights, time and length of blooming, etc.) for greatest success.

NATIVE WILDFLOWERS AND SHRUBS

Milkweeds
Meadowsweet
Joe-pye Weed
Dogbane
Sweet Pepperbush
Black-eyed Susan
New Jersey Tea
Mountain Mints
Blueberry
Smooth Sumac
Asters
Dandelion
Goldenrod

NATURALIZED, NON-NATIVE WILDFLOWERS

Yarrow
Knapweeds
Thistles
Mints
Queen Anne’s Lace
Oxeye Daisy
Clovers

GARDEN FLOWERS: ANNUALS

Cosmos
Lantana
Nasturtium
Mexican Sunflower (Tithonia)
Zinnia
Verbena Bonariensis

GARDEN FLOWERS: PERENNIALS

Coreopsis
Coneflowers
Phlox (many varieties)
Bee Balm
Sedums
Liatris
Butterfly Weed
Yarrow

GARDEN SHRUBS

Beauty Bush (Kolkwitzia amabilis)
Butterfly Bush
Privet
Lilac

Be aware of bloom time for shrubs and perennials. It is especially good to have early blooming and late blooming flowers.

EXAMPLES OF LARVAL FOOD PLANTS (HOST PLANTS)

Birch
Mourning Cloak, Tiger Swallowtail
Elm
Comma, Mourning Cloak
Poplar, Aspen, Cottonwood
Mourning Cloak, Viceroy,
Red-spotted Purple, Tiger Swallowtail
Black Locust, Ground Nut
Silver-spotted Skipper
Spicebush, Sassafras
Spicebush Swallowtail
Blueberry
Spring Azure
Grasses, Sedges
Common Wood Nymph, European
Skipper, Little Wood Satyr
Common Burdock
Painted Lady
Parsley, Dill, Carrots, Queen Anne’s Lace. Bronze Fennel:
: Black Swallowtail
Violets
Great-spangled Fritillary
Milkweeds
Monarch
Thistle
Painted Lady
Everlastings, Pussytoes
American Lady

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Here are some plants that I have in my yard, which are planted or allowed to stay to encourage butterfly populations. Many of the nectar sources also attract hummingbirds.

**Phlox** – for nectar – find out when they bloom, I have a variety that blooms early and another variety that blooms late

**Queen Anne’s Lace** – for nectar and host plant for Black Swallowtail

**Bronze Fennel** – very popular host plant for Black Swallowtail

**Clovers** – for nectar

**Joe-pye Weed** – for nectar, late blooming

**Black-eyed Susan** – for nectar

**Cinquefoil** – for nectar

**Hawkweed** – for nectar

**Common Valerian** – for nectar, early blooming

**Daisy Fleabane** – for nectar

**Beauty Bush (Kolkwitzia amabilis)** – for nectar, early blooming

**Violet** – host plant for Great-spangled Fritillary

**Daisy** – for nectar

**Everlasting, Pussytoes** – host plant for American Lady

**Chives** – for nectar, early

**Blueberry bushes** – for nectar (early), host plant for Azure

**Lantana** – attractive annual nectar plant

**Milkweeds (Common Milkweed, Swamp Milkweed, Butterfly Weed)** – for nectar, host plant for Monarch

**Thistle** – for nectar, host plant for Painted Lady

**Nettles** – host plant for Red Admiral

**Sorrel, Curly Dock** – host plant for American Copper

**Dandelion** – for nectar (I deadhead after bloom)

**Ground Nut** – host plant for Silver-spotted Skipper

**Purple Coneflower** – for nectar (leave seedheads for Goldfinches!)

**Butterfly Bush** – for nectar, an extremely popular flower, late blooming

**Liatris** – for nectar

**Grasses and sedges** – I let them grow in clumps, host plant for variety of skippers

**Verbena bonariensis** – tall, spindly plant, extremely popular nectar flower, late blooming

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**Milkweed for Monarchs**

If you want to encourage Monarch butterflies, you might consider an out-of-the-way spot to put in a patch of Common Milkweed. Collect seeds from pods in the fall, keep outside in a dry place over the winter. Start seeds in flats in the spring, put in the ground when established. The first year the plants will be small, but after it gets established, don’t be surprised if you find Monarch eggs or caterpillars on the plants!

You can also plant Swamp Milkweed (which doesn’t need to be in a swampy area), or Butterfly Weed. These don’t spread by root runners like the Common Milkweed.

The Milkweeds have beautiful nectar flowers and will most likely attract the female Monarch butterflies for laying eggs. Call me if you would like information about raising Monarch butterflies.