

**WANTED**  
**ALIVE IN YOUR GARDEN**  
 Common Buckeye

**Text by Jane Hurwitz**



Mary Anne Borge

**Known Food Preferences:** Like many seasoned travelers, Common Buckeye caterpillars are able to feast on local cuisines as they migrate across the United States and southern Canada. Weeds in the Plantain Family, such as Common Plantain; garden flowers such as Garden Snap-dragon; and the yellow-flowered Butter and Eggs are non-native caterpillar food possibilities. Native plants such as false foxgloves, wild petunias, figworts, and Turkey Tangle Fogfruit are also sought out by egg-laying Common Buckeyes, which deposit single eggs on leaf buds and fresh plant leaves. While the menu is varied across a few plant families, all of the caterpillar food plants chosen by Common Buckeye contain iridoid glycosides, a group of chemicals that act as egg-laying as well as caterpillar-feeding stimulants. Iridoid glycosides sequestered by the hungry caterpillars provide resistance against some predators such as ants—these are bad tasting caterpillars! Unlike the case with Monarchs, the chemicals that protect Common Buckeye caterpillars and chrysalises are not retained in the adult butterfly.



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**Winter hide-out:** Common Buckeyes have no need for winter hide-outs—they are year-round residents in many southern states where they produce multiple broods. Each spring, southern-born adults leave their warm winter homes and migrate northward, eventually populating most of the United States (except the northwestern states) and into southern Canada. Each fall, the offspring of these mighty fliers migrate southward, returning to the warm southern United States and coastal areas as far north as central California and North Carolina.



Jane Hurwitz

**Known disguises:**

Common Buckeye caterpillars use the cloak of darkness as a disguise, wandering off the food plant to hide during the day, returning at night to feed.

**Jane Hurwitz is editor of *Butterfly Gardener* magazine and author of *Butterfly Gardening: The North American Butterfly Association Guide*.**

**Special weaponry:** The orange and black coloring of Common Buckeye caterpillars advertises to would-be predators that they are not palatable. If enemies don't heed the aposematic warning, caterpillars also have a foul defensive strategy—when disturbed, they vomit, creating a very effective deterrent to being eaten. In adults, the bright, bullseye-shaped eyespots found on the wings may help to deter predators.

**If capture is avoided:** Common Buckeye butterflies will visit nectar-producing flowers in a variety of habitats. Flying low to the ground with quick and erratic movements, then spreading their spectacular wings on a flower, they are welcome to find a hangout in any garden!



Jane Hurwitz