

WILDLIFE IN CONNECTICUT

WILDLIFE HABITAT SERIES

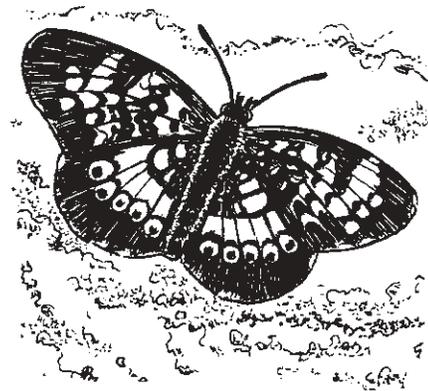
Butterfly Gardens

General Information

Gardens designed to attract butterflies are most successful when careful thought is given to site and plant selection. Consideration of the needs of butterflies and their life histories is also important. By following a few simple tips, a garden can easily become alive with fluttering visitors.

Most butterflies are sun-loving insects, so be sure to plant the garden in a sunny location. Butterflies use the sun's heat to warm the muscles in their thorax (the middle part of an insect's body), which enables them to fly. Many butterfly gardeners place flat surfaces, such as rocks, among the plants for butterflies to bask on. As long as the site chosen has sun for a good part of the day, it will be used by butterflies.

When choosing plants for your butterfly garden, be sure to provide both larval (caterpillar) "host" plants and adult nectar sources. For example, many caterpillars of fritillary butterflies eat the leaves of violets, their host plants; later, the adults visit the blooms of a different plant, such as purple coneflower, for nectar. Sometimes, one plant can



serve the needs of both butterfly and caterpillar, as is the case with butterfly weed. Trees and shrubs also serve as host plants for many caterpillars. It is important to remember that gardeners who provide host plants for larvae must tolerate the sometimes "unsightly" look to their plants as the foliage is being consumed by the caterpillars. Remember, do not use insecticides because this will defeat the purpose of the garden.

Two other important considerations when gardening for butterflies are to provide a series of blooms throughout the season and to emphasize the planting of native species. Suggestions for spring-blooming native plants include wild columbine and violets. Columbine will grow in a sunny, rocky area in addition to its usual woodland habitat. Both of these examples are host plants for caterpillars. Mid-season blooming plants include mountain mint, dogbane, coreopsis, milkweed, butterfly weed, thistle (only field or pasture should be used) and wild bergamot. Black-eyed Susan and purple coneflower are also mid-season bloomers and, although not native to New England, are native to the midwestern United States. Late-season blooming plants for attracting butterflies include New England aster and goldenrod. Both of these plants can reach heights above three feet, but cultivars are available for growing shorter plants. Cultivars



are propagated from cuttings not from seed. Some native plant gardeners prefer not to use cultivars because they do not grow exactly as the parent plant in the wild. It is best to refer to a field guide to determine the color of the flowers and the soil in which the plants grow best.

Finding a source for the plants is the final step in planning a butterfly garden. Plants **should not** be collected from the wild because many will not transplant well and they have an ecological role to perform in the natural landscape. With some plants, such as goldenrod and milkweed, seed can be collected (only a small quantity of seed should be collected from a large stand of the plant) and later sowed in the garden. Success will be dependent, in part, on the maturity of the seed being collected. There are a few nurseries in Connecticut and in other states where nursery-propagated native wildflowers can be obtained.

Recommended Guides for Butterfly Identification

Glassberg, Jeffrey. 1993. *Butterflies through Binoculars*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 160 pp.

Pyle, Robert Michael. 1985. *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Butterflies*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.), 924 pp.

Stokes, Donald and Lillian and Ernest Williams. 1991. *The Butterfly Book*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 95 pp.

Wright, Amy Bartlett. 1993. *Peterson's First Guide to Caterpillars*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 128 pp.

Plant List

Wildflowers

Achillea (Yarrow) (A)
Apocynum (Dogbane) (A)
Asclepias (Milkweeds) (A, L)
Aster (A, L)
Cirsium (Thistle, use field or pasture only) (A, L)
Coreopsis (A)
Echinacea (Coneflower) (A)
Eupatorium (Joe-pye-weed) (A)
Geranium (A)
Monarda (Beebalm) (A)
Pycnanthemum (Mountain mint) (A)
Rudbeckia (Black-eyed Susan) (A)
Solidago (Goldenrod) (A)
Verononia (Ironweed) (A)
Viola (Violets) (A, L)

Shrubs

Clethra (Pepperbush) (A)
Lindera (Spicebush) (L)
Rhododendron (A)
Vaccinium (Blueberry) (A, L)
Viburnum (A)

Trees

Cornus (Dogwood) (A, L)
Juniperus (Red cedar) (L)
Prunus (Wild cherry) (L)
Sassafras (L)

A=Adult nectar source

L=Larval food plant