



Tips for Creating a Butterfly Garden in Your Own Backyard



1) Select the Right Location

Since butterflies rarely feed in the shade, the best spot will be a sunny location with some shelter from strong winds.

2) Go Native!

Whenever possible, go native in your garden! Native plants are accustomed to the natural soils and climate of New Jersey, and therefore, they often require less fertilizer and water than non-native plants. Native plants will help to increase biodiversity, and they often provide better food-value since our native New Jersey butterflies have adapted over time to feed on these native plants. You will find some good non-native or exotic butterfly plants too, but before you plant them, you should make sure they won't escape from your garden and become invasive. Also, try to eliminate insecticide use in your garden since insecticides often kill both desirable and non-desirable insects.

3) Choose Plants for both Adults & Caterpillars

While it's great to invite adult butterflies into your garden with nectar-producing plants, it's even better to invite the whole family by including some larval host plants for the caterpillars. Since caterpillars don't eat the same food as the adults, it is necessary to provide food for both stages of the lifecycle. Below, you will find a few examples of plants you might wish to include in your garden. You might already have some of these trees, flowers or herbs somewhere in your backyard or garden. A successful butterfly gardener should expect to have some of his or her plants nibbled away by the caterpillars, so plan on planting a few extras to share with the next generation of beautiful butterflies.

4) Plan Before You Plant

A little planning can go a long way.

- Obtain a soil test to check nutrient and pH levels. Call 609-989-6830 to get a soil test kit from the Mercer County Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension office. (Or visit <http://njaes.rutgers.edu/soiltestinglab/kits.asp> for extension offices in other counties).
- Draw a sketch that considers the layout of your garden and the size of your plants at maturity.
- Group several of the same type of plant together to help butterflies find your garden and to encourage them to linger longer as they collect nectar.
- Select plants with large brightly-colored blooms or showy clusters of small flowers, in a variety of sizes, colors and blooming times.
- Don't be afraid to start small the first year. If you don't have a lot of planting space, ask your garden center for plants that grow well in containers.
- Consult your local garden center or county horticulturist for suggestions on the type of plants that work well in your climate. See below for some suggested resources.

5) Provide Puddles and Basking Areas

Butterflies can often be seen "puddling" in groups while gathering moisture and minerals from mud puddles or shallow wet areas. You can create your own mud puddle simply by placing a shallow pan in a sunny location and filling it with sand, soil and pebbles. Then add enough water to barely cover the top of the mixture.

A Few Suggestions:

Native Plants to attract a variety of adult butterflies

Asclepias tuberosa - Butterfly milkweed
Asclepias incarnata - Swamp milkweed
Aster novae-angliae - New England aster
Eupatorium maculatum - Joe-pye-weed
Monarda didyma - Monarda, Beebalm
Phlox paniculata - Summer phlox
Liatris spicata - Blazing star, Gayfeather
Verbena canadensis - Vervain
Coreopsis rosea - Coreopsis, Tickseed

Host plants for Caterpillars

Sassafras and Spicebush - Spicebush Swallowtail
 Cultivated carrot, Parsley, Dill, Fennel - Black Swallowtail
 Tuliptree, Wild cherries, Lilac - Tiger Swallowtail
 Milkweeds (e.g. Butterfly milkweed, Swamp milkweed) - Monarch
 Asters - Pearl Crescent
 Violets and Pansies - Variegated and Great Spangled Fritillary
 Snapdragons and Verbenas - Buckeye
 Hackberry, Willows, Aspens, Elms - Mourning Cloak*
 (*This is one of the few NJ species that over winters as an adult and uses a butterfly box.)

For More Information:

<http://www.pollinator.org> - The Pollinator Partnership

<http://www.mgofmc.org/bflygarden.html> - Master Gardeners of Mercer County

<http://www.npsnj.org/references.htm> - NJ Native Plant Society

http://www.bhwp.org/native/native_plant_info_sheets/Native_Perennials_for_Butterflies.pdf - Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve

<http://www.butterfliesandmoths.org/map> - Click on the map for a list of New Jersey Butterflies

Butterflies through Binoculars: A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Eastern North America by Jeffrey Glassberg

Stokes Butterfly Book: The Complete Guide to Butterfly Gardening, Identification and Behavior by Donald & Lillian Stokes, & Ernest Williams