



How to Create a Butterfly Garden

Mini-sanctuaries, like the butterfly garden designed and maintained by the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Jersey Shore, provide our native butterfly species with the nectar, food, and shelter they need to breed and survive. In fact, many butterflies will complete their entire life – from egg to caterpillar (larva) to pupa (chrysalis) and finally to flying adult – all within a single garden. Happily, creating a butterfly garden is fairly easy. Once installed, a butterfly garden comes alive with beauty, color, and movement, dazzling the young and the old and reminding us all of the ability we have to make an impact on our environment.

Selecting a Site

When choosing a site for your butterfly garden, look for the sunniest spot. Butterflies rely on the sun's heat to warm their bodies for flight, and flowers produce nectar in relation to the sun they receive. The more sun in your garden, the more nectar you provide, and the more butterflies you'll accommodate.

Designing Your Garden

Once you have selected your site, you can plan the size and shape of the garden. If space allows, you'll want to include a few flowering shrubs. In addition to nectar, shrubs provide shelter from wind and rain, cover for nocturnal roosting, and places for caterpillars to attach their chrysalises.

Selecting Plants for Butterflies

Try to include as many native plants as possible because they are adapted to our climate and soil conditions – and because our native butterflies (and other insects as well) are adapted to them. Shrubs and perennials make better butterfly plants than most annuals. They come up each year and, once established, require less water and fertilizer than annuals. However, a few annuals are such good butterfly plants that you'll want to include them each year despite the extra work it entails.

Butterflies are strongly attracted by fragrance and prefer tubular flowers whose petals provide landing platforms. Purple coneflower, for example, with its flat petals and central cluster of tubular flowers makes an excellent butterfly flower. Blazing Star with its tubular flowers arranged on a spike is another excellent choice. Color is less important than the shape and the amount of nectar provided. Many common garden flowers that look appealing to us have very little value for butterflies – roses, chrysanthemums, and peonies, for example.

A successful garden provides more than nectar for adult butterflies. Think of your garden as a nursery for caterpillars too. Many caterpillars have very specific food requirements and feed only on a certain family or species of plants, their host plants. Monarchs, for example, lay their eggs only on flowers in the milkweed family; pearl crescents lay their eggs on asters, and spicebush swallowtails depend on sassafras in our area. Chewing damage to your garden will be minimal because most caterpillars

have such particular food preferences, and many actually prefer weeds, grasses, and trees.

Another consideration to keep in mind when selecting plants is seasonality. Since some butterflies become active in April and others are still flying or migrating in October, selecting both early and late season bloomers will help provide food at critical times of the year.

The Nectar and Host Plant List below has been compiled with the input from butterfly gardeners and naturalists throughout New Jersey. Incorporating these plants in your butterfly garden should help make it a success.

NECTAR PLANTS FOR ADULT BUTTERFLIES **(N= native, I= alien, A= annual)**

Asters, Aster spp N, I
Bee Balm, Monarda spp N
Blazing star, Liatris spp N
Butterfly weed, Swamp milkweed, Asclepias spp N
Catmints, Nepeta spp
Coreopsis, Coreopsis spp N
Goldenrod, Solidago spp N
Joe-Pye weed, Eupatorium spp N
Lobelias, Lobelia spp N, I
Purple coneflower, Echinacea spp N
Salvias (sages), Salvia spp N, I
Sedum (stonecrops), Sedum spp
Globe Amaranth, Gomphrena spp A
Lantana, Lantana camara A
Mexican Sunflower, Tithonia spp A
Pentas, Pentas lanceolata A
Verbena, Verbena hybrids A
Zinnia, Zinnia elegans A
Blue Mist Shrub, Caryopteris x clandonensis I
Butterfly bush, Buddleia davidii I
Buttonbush, Cephananthus occidentalis N
Glossy Abelia, Abelia x grandiflora I
Sweet Pepperbush, Clethra alnifolia N
Chaste tree

HOST PLANTS FOR CATERPILLARS **(* denotes host plant for 3 or more species)**

Grasses (especially Little Bluestem and Switchgrass) *	Locust
Clover *	Red cedar
Pearly and sweet everlasting, pussytoes	Sassafras
Aster	Willows
Fennel, parsley, rue, dill, Queen Anne's Lace	Oaks *
Milkweeds	Tulip tree *
Black cherry, wild plum, chokeberry *	Blueberry *
Elms, Hackberries *	Sumac *