

Butterfly Gardening

“The power to enrich a patch of earth with beautiful butterflies, no matter how humble the plot or simple the effort, is awesome.”

– Robert Pyle

Butterflies in Our Midst

The San Francisco Bay Area is home to 142 species of butterflies, which depend on a great diversity of plant communities. With each passing decade, however, fewer and fewer butterflies are commonly seen. They cannot live on concrete and asphalt. As wild meadows and flower-coated hill-sides give way to development, the quality of our living environment declines while, for other species, existence itself becomes threatened. Ecologist Robert Pyle expresses his concern about what he has called

“the extinction of experience – the loss of everyday species within our own radius of reach.”

According to Pyle, “When we lose the common wildlife in our immediate surroundings, we run the risk of becoming inured to nature’s absence, blind to delight, and . . . alienated from the land.”

What We Can Do

Butterflies, however, needn’t disappear. In fact, the pattern of decline can even be reversed by those willing to do some butterfly gardening.

If each of us plants a few flowers to provide nectar for adult butterflies and some host plants to serve as food for caterpillars (which become butterflies), the entire texture of our communities can be enhanced. Regardless of how small our garden space may be we can still have a positive impact on the butterfly population. One square foot of space can provide a feeding station for many butterflies.

A flower pot or window box filled with cosmos and zinnias makes an excellent “butterfly restaurant.” A somewhat larger patch of ground planted with Buddleia (butterfly bush) or a vast plot sown with native wildflowers can attract and nurture thousands of butterflies.



Mourning cloak

Cover photos: upper, Western tiger swallowtail
lower, variable checkerspot



Cosmos



Monkey flower



Zinnia



Western tiger swallowtail nectaring on daisy tree.



Monarch butterflies nectaring on Mexican sunflower.

Tips and Techniques for the Butterfly Gardener

1. The ideal location for a butterfly garden is an area open to your view and enjoyment, yet relatively undisturbed by pets or playing children.

2. Because butterflies are cold-blooded, their flight muscles will not work if they are chilled; so a warm, sunny, wind-protected area is the perfect spot for your butterfly garden. Tall background plants, walls, or fencing can provide a wind shelter.

3. Plant flowers that are preferred by butterflies. Their favorite colors are pink, purple, yellow, and orange. Flat flowers (zinnias and cosmos), short tubular flowers (lupine), and flower clusters (verbena and lantana) are best because they provide easy access to nectar. Drooping flowers, though nectar-rich, are less suitable because they provide no place to perch comfortably while sipping.

4. Occasional “sun bathing” allows a butterfly to remain active by raising its body temperature. A few flat stones or boulders in sunny areas of the garden will provide a place for basking.

5. Many butterflies drink water and extract mineral salts from damp soil and puddles. Including shallow pools or moist spots will attract a “puddle club.”

6. The most successful, environmentally sound gardens are those which are pesticide-free. The enchantment provided by a garden alive with butterflies will far outweigh the annoyance of a few undesirable garden pests.

The human race faces a multitude of environmental problems. Thinning ozone, acid rain, polluted rivers and lakes, and global warming present complex problems which seem to defy solutions, especially at the level of the individual.

However, working in our own backyards, we can help to stem the destruction of our local ecosystems by promoting species diversity. By restoring and protecting habitat in our own yards, we not only please ourselves, we hold open the possibility that future generations can also experience the natural splendor and living art provided by butterflies among garden blossoms.

The following plant species are considered excellent for attracting butterflies.
Try a few and watch your art-in-motion garden come alive.

NECTAR PLANTS (for butterflies)

Perennials

Yarrow	Achillea millefolium*
False Indigo	Amorpha californica*
Coast Rock Cress	Arabis blepharophylla*
Common Milkweed	Asclepias speciosa**
Butterfly Bush	Buddleia davidii
Wild Lilac	Ceanothus species**
Coreopsis	Coreopsis californica*
Coreopsis	Coreopsis lanceolata
Purple Cone Flower	Echinacea purpurea
Buckwheat	Eriogonum faseiculatum*
Lantana	Lantana montevidensis
Silver Lupine	Lupinus albifrons*
Lupine	Lupinus species**
Sticky Monkey Flower	Mimulus aurantiacus**
Daisy Tree	Mimulus guttatus**
Common Monkey Flower	Montanoa grandiflora
Flowering Tobacco	Nicotiana glauca*
Wild Tobacco	Nicotiana (some*)
Black-eyed Susan	Rudbeckia laciniata
Sedum (Stonecrop)	Sedum species
Goldenrod	Solidago species*
Johnny-jump-up	Viola pedunculata*

Annuals

Cosmos	Cosmos bipinnatus
Heliotrope	Heliotropium arborescens
Alyssum	Lobularia maritima
Pincushion Flower	Scabiosa caucasica
Mexican Sunflower	Tithonia rotundifolia
Verbena	Verbena species (some*)
Zinnia	Zinnia elegans

FOOD PLANTS (for caterpillars)

Perennials

Dutchman's Pipe	Aristolochia californica*
Milkweed	Asclepias species (some*)
Michaelmas Daisy	Aster regulinis
Borage	Borago officinalis
Wild Lilac	Ceanothus species*
Lupine	Lupinus species*

Annuals

Snapdragon	Antirrhinum majus
Nasturtium	Tropaeolum species
Violet	Viola species*

* California natives

** California native and host

Visitor Centers

ARDENWOOD HISTORIC FARM

Fremont (510) 796-0663
awvisit@ebparks.org

BLACK DIAMOND MINES

Antioch (925) 757-2620
bdvisit@ebparks.org

COYOTE HILLS REGIONAL PARK

Fremont (510) 795-9385
chvisit@ebparks.org

CRAB COVE

Alameda (510) 521-6887
ccove@ebparks.org

SUNOL REGIONAL WILDERNESS

Sunol (925) 862-2601
svisit@ebparks.org

TILDEN NATURE AREA/EEC and LITTLE FARM

Berkeley (510) 525-2233
tnarea@ebparks.org

Further Reading:

The Butterfly Book, Stokes & Williams
The Butterfly Garden, Tekulsky

The Regional Parks Botanic Garden, located in Tilden Park, Berkeley, has an annual native plant sale on the third Saturday of April. Many butterfly-attracting plants are available. (510) 841-8732

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This brochure is provided as a public service of the Interpretive and Recreation Services Department of the East Bay Regional Park District. For more information, call one of the visitor centers listed above.

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