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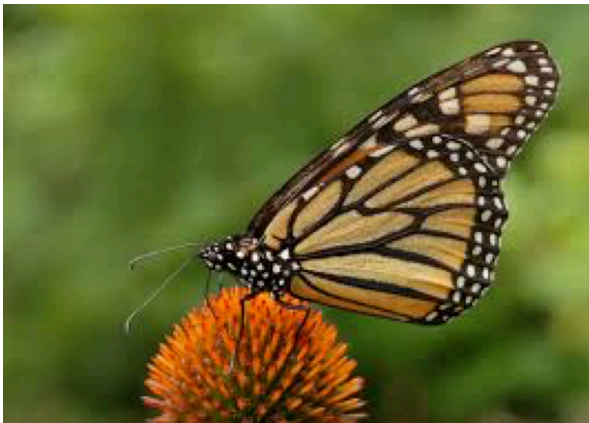


PLANT A BUTTERFLY GARDEN!

By Charles Bartlett, GVST Volunteer

Plant your butterfly garden and help save a butterfly species! A butterfly garden can be a wonderful part of your landscape and will make a meaningful difference by creating habitat for our imperiled butterfly friends. Gardening for butterflies is something anyone who loves growing plants and flowers can do. A garden that is good for butterflies also is good for other pollinators such as bees and hummingbirds who often share the same nectar plants and habitat.

THE FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS OF A BUTTERFLY GARDEN



Monarch butterfly

Butterfly gardening is easy and, like any horticultural endeavor that creates habitat, depends on providing four basic elements.

Flowers and food: Plant a mix of flowers that bloom from the start of spring through fall, and food plants for caterpillars.

Shelter: Leave bare patches of ground, have small brush piles (in unused corners of the yard), and leave the herbaceous plants standing over the winter to protect overwintering eggs and caterpillar pupae waiting to emerge.

Water: A mud puddle is ideal for butterflies providing them with a source of water and salt.

A safe, pesticide-free environment: Don't use chemical insecticides (especially systemic ones), use caution when applying organic pesticides, and use herbicides only for a weed emergency.

A LITTLE BUTTERFLY BIOLOGY

Butterflies and moths have three stages in their life cycles before becoming the flying adult insects we recognize. The mother butterfly lays eggs on preferred food plants.

- The eggs hatch into caterpillars that feed on their food plants. These caterpillars grow to their full size before going dormant as a chrysalis (butterfly) or a cocoon (moth), in preparation for adulthood.
- Then caterpillars go through metamorphosis and emerge as flying adults.
- The adults immediately mate, lay eggs, feed, and die leaving behind the next generation.



Tiger swallowtail, the largest butterfly in North America

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT MONARCH BUTTERFLIES?

Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) populate most of the US and southern Canada. They exist west of the Rocky Mountains, but in smaller numbers. Sightings of Monarchs occur in almost every state.



Monarch caterpillar

A monarch's life is intrinsically woven with the milkweed plant, a once common native perennial plant.

Its life begins when a female lays an egg on the underside of the leaf or other part of a milkweed plant.

In three to five days, a very tiny, hungry caterpillar emerges and begins feasting on the milkweed plant.

As the caterpillar grows to full size, it goes through five molts (stages of life) that are each a

large step to becoming a butterfly. Each time the caterpillar literally sheds its skin and reforms a larger one. **At the final molt, in about 10-14 days, the caterpillar is a beautiful yellow-green-black striped color about 1 ¾ inches long.** Now the caterpillar wanders from the milkweed plant and finds just the right spot.

It spins a pad of silk, and attaches itself, hanging upside down. After many hours, its skin will split to reveal **its translucent green chrysalis that is its home for the next 11-15 days as it takes its final form as a monarch butterfly.**

Once emerging, and after drying its beautiful orange wings, it takes flight to find nectar, its new food. **The monarch butterfly will live from two to six weeks**, during which time it will mate, and begin the cycle again. This cycle may happen from four to five times per summer, four to five generations, and **on the final generation of the summer, called the Super Generation, something really amazing happens. These butterflies, with more densely scaled and slightly larger wings, will live from seven to eight months.**

WHAT TO PLANT?

Often the flowering plants that feed the adult moths and butterflies are different from the plants on which their caterpillars feed. For a butterfly garden, the gardener must plant both types of plants. Most flowers that attract moths and butterflies will feed a wide range of species. When it comes to feeding their caterpillars, butterflies and moths can either have a need for very specific food plants, or have a taste for a wider range of host plants. This depends on the species of each moth and butterfly as they will have different requirements.

- To attract and feed adult butterflies, we need a garden that supplies many months of nectar-rich flowers for a wide range of butterflies.
- Flower shapes that attract butterflies are generally either flat-topped flower spikes with lots of tiny flowers, or cone-type flowers.
- Food plans for caterpillars vary, but widely fed-upon plants include oak, willow, cherry, poplar, apple, dandelions, clover, and dill.
- For widespread migrating species of butterflies like the Monarch, various species of milkweed (*Asclepias* species) provide both larval food and nectar for adults.

SAWS-RECOMMENDED SPECIAL BUTTERFLY PLANTS

1. **Pride of Barbados.** Heat-loving, drought-resistant shrub to 6' tall. Long blooming season April to December. Butterfly favorite. Deer resistant.
2. **Thryallis.** Drought-resistant, deer-resistant, spectacular yellow flowers for many months. Sun or part shade, 8' tall.
3. **Dwarf Firebush.** Loves summer heat, stands dry conditions, a hummingbird favorite.
4. **Blackfoot Daisy.** Loves hot, dry, well-drained locations. Tends to be evergreen, 1' tall, long-blooming season.
5. **Almond Verbena.** Butterfly magnet, sweet, white flower clusters, good fragrance, tolerates dry conditions well, everygreen, 6'-8' tall, very long blooming season March to December.



Pride of Barbados



Fall-Blooming Aster

6. **Fall-Blooming Aster.** Low-growing evergreen plants, beautiful, lavender flowers. Very drought-resistant, no insect or disease problems. Good nectar source for many butterflies, deer-resistant with very aromatic foliage. Up to 24" tall, the only Aster variety for Texas and the Southwest. Will live for many years in the garden.

7. **Blue Mist Flower.** A butterfly favorite, blooms March to December. Tolerates all soil types, will slowly spread in the garden, prefers full sun locations, drought resistant. A must-have for every butterfly garden.

8. **Frogfruit.** Low, evergreen spreading groundcover, prefers full sun locations. Small white flowers are an excellent nectar source for many butterflies. Leaves are the host plant for several types of butterflies.

9. **Goldenrod.** A fall butterfly magnet, evergreen foliage, dies down to the ground in winter, with a rosette of green foliage, huge clusters of golden flowers in the fall. Loves wet or dry conditions, will slowly spread in the garden, likes all soil types. Cut back by ½ in July to keep plant shorter, with more flowers. Blooms September to December, deer-resistant, a must-have for the butterfly garden. Pollen does not cause allergies.
10. **Damianita.** Loves heat and dry conditions, deer resistant, very long blooming season with tiny yellow flowers, 1 foot tall.
11. **Cowpen Daisy.** Long-blooming yellow composite with beautiful daisy-like flowers, drought-resistant, butterfly nectar source, 4 feet tall, beautiful blue-green foliage.



Tropical milkweed

12. **Milkweeds.** Many long-lasting varieties, deep-rooted plants tolerate dry conditions well, larvae food hosts for monarchs, a great nectar source for many butterflies, 3-4' tall. Will naturalize in the garden.

13. **Salvia.** Many varieties, excellent nectar source for many types of butterflies, tend to be evergreen in the winter months, very long blooming season March to December, tolerates dry conditions well.

14. **Red Yucca.** Great nectar source for hummingbirds, evergreen plant, very drought-resistant, long blooming season June to December, both pink and yellow flowering

forms.

15. **Rosemary.** Evergreen, greatest bloom period in cool seasons and winter, good nectar source for many butterflies, fragrant foliage.
16. **Turk's Cap.** Evergreen shrub, good nectar force for hummingbirds, drought-tolerant, edible red fruit, very long blooming season.
17. **Dwarf Barbados Cherry.** Select dwarf form of plant, edible red fruit, extremely drought tolerant, beautiful pink flowers over a very long blooming season from April to December.
18. **Flame Acanthus.** Favorite nectar source for butterflies and hummingbirds, may lose leaves in a severe winter, tolerates very dry conditions well, a must-have plant for the butterfly garden.
19. **Yaupon Holly.** Beautiful evergreen shrub, male and female plants, choose fruiting type such as "Pride of Houston" for excellent fruit set and colorful berries in the fall and winter, showy white flowers in the spring, drought-tolerant, an excellent specimen plant or hedge.
20. **Redbud Tree.** Early spring bloom, drought-resistant, both pink and white blooming types, excellent early nectar source in the spring.
21. **Texas Persimmon.** Male and female trees, edible black fruit in late summer, drought-resistant, evergreen small tree/bush, very deer-resistant.
22. **Anacacho Orchid Tree.** Long blooming season, tolerates drought, white flowers, distinctive leaves, evergreen with some winter protection. A truly beautiful small flowering tree for every garden site and soil type.



Yaupon Holly