

Basic Perennial Butterfly Gardening

Botanical Bytes
By Gregory Bruner

4 Things Every Butterfly Garden Needs:

Food

Shelter

Sun

Water

The need for food is a force that drives all living creatures. Creating a long-term garden for butterflies takes time and planning. The needs of the adults as well as the young must be considered in the garden design. Below is an excellent general list for butterfly perennials. If you wish to attract a particular type of butterfly, you will need to research its favorite nectar plants. Many trees and shrubs also can be planted in a butterfly garden as nectar or larval food sources. I am concentrating on the perennial side of the garden at this time.

The selection of plants is very important to the success of a butterfly garden. Nectar source plants should be placed in an area that receives sun for at least half of the day to improve nectar production. Multiple plants of each species should be planted near each other; this is more attractive to butterflies than scattering single plants throughout the garden. Planting a variety of nectar plants will allow more types of butterflies to be attracted to the garden.

Excellent Perennials for Nectar Sources:

Aquilegia	Geranium	Phlox
Asclepias	Helianthus	Rudbeckia
Aster	Hibiscus	Salvia
Coreopsis	Liatris	Solidago
Echinacea	Lobelia	Stokesia
Eupatorium	Monarda	Tradescantia
Gaillardia	Penstemon	Verbena

Excellent Perennials for Larval Food Sources:

Asclepias	Eupatorium	Passiflora
Aster	Helianthus	Penstemon
Chasmanthium	Hibiscus	Viola
Chelone	Lonicera	

Shelter in a butterfly friendly garden serves many purposes. Protection from wind, rain, and predators is extremely important to butterflies. Trees and shrubs make wonderful places for butterflies to hide from local cats and birds; they also create windbreaks so the butterflies can relax more and enjoy the garden. If trees and shrubs are in short supply, consider purchasing butterfly houses, erecting a privacy fence, or planting near a building to help as a windbreak.

Butterflies worship the sun. They are actually cold blooded and fly best when the temperature is between 80–100 degrees Fahrenheit. This is why more butterflies are seen in the afternoon fluttering about during the hottest part of the day. Butterflies enjoy perching and sitting in the sun to absorb the heat-giving rays of sunlight. In the mornings if it is too cool, the butterflies will fly a short distance, then land and spread their wings to absorb the warming rays of sun before taking flight again. The addition of a small split rail fence, large stones, or some garden statuary will add a landing zone for butterflies in the sunniest areas of the garden.

Water is very important to any butterfly garden, but a lot is not necessary. The butterflies need only a small birdbath or small puddle. Quiet, shallow, still water is best. Shrubbery and tree species that have slightly cupped leaves should be considered in plant selection. The shallow cupping of the leaves will allow morning dew and rain to collect in small amounts, which is perfect for a butterfly.

Butterfly gardening can be enjoyed on any scale, from a small fence corner to half of your yard. These gardens are a constant work in progress, always evolving and changing. Our labors are rewarded by the creation of a habitat which is a paradise for the fluttering jewels of the garden.