# Attracting Butterflies to Your Garden

**Having a garden for butterflies is fun -- especially when hordes of them (like this summer!) come fluttering in. The key to any butterfly garden...**

Having a garden for butterflies is fun—especially when hordes of them (like this summer!) come fluttering in.

The key to any butterfly garden is making the right selection of flowers. But just by putting in [Agastache neomexicana](http://www.highcountrygardens.com/11813.html) or Echinacea purpurea, you’re guaranteed to get a few butterflies.

If you have some favorite butterflies, though, it’s even possible to plant specifically for them because each butterfly species has its own favorite flower. For example, the nectar of the Buddleia (Butterfly Bush) attracts Giant Swallowtails and Painted Ladies. Asters attract the Common Sulfur and Buckeye.

Adult butterflies are very picky about where they lay their eggs and choose specific food plants so when the caterpillars emerge, they can begin to feed. In many cases food source plants are different from the nectar source. Planting for caterpillar food as well as nectar for butterflies makes an interesting challenge.

The relationship between plants and butterflies is intricate. As butterflies travel from flower to flower, they carry pollen and fertilize plants. It’s a great balance, although the downside is environmental pollutants continue to devastate fragile ecosystems and scientists are seeing whole butterfly populations dramatically decline.

So what happens when we create a pesticide free garden for butterflies is we also participate in their conservation. If we can create a natural habitat for them, we are ensuring their safety.

Following are some nectar providing perennials.

* Dalea purpurea (Purple Prairie Clover)
* Echinacea purpurea (Purple Coneflower)
* Gaillardia grandiflora (Blanket Flower)
* Helianthus maximiliana ‘Lemon Yellow’
* [Lavandula](http://www.highcountrygardens.com/lavender.html), different species
* Monarda (Beebalm)
* Salvia, different species
* Sedum ‘Ruby Glow’, ‘Autumn Joy’ and others

To ensure the availability of nectar sources throughout the summer, long-blooming annuals such as cosmos, verbena, lantana, penta, strawflower and heliotrope can be planted between the perennials or in potted container gardens.

Also, all butterflies will hang around mud holes, a characteristic called ‘puddling.’ Mud is a source of mineral salts.

The time spent on selecting butterfly plants can turn your yard into a home for many different species. They’ll offer you hours of enjoyment and in turn you’re helping the environment. And many of the butterfly plants also attract hummingbirds, which is another plus.

# Bringing Butterflies to Your Garden

**With a finely tuned sense of smell, butterflies can identify their favorite nectar plants for miles around. The key to any butterfly garden...**

With a finely tuned sense of smell, butterflies can identify their favorite nectar plants for miles around. The key to any butterfly garden (and this includes window boxes) is making the right selection of flowers.

It’s easy to plan for butterflies and if you have favorite kinds, it’s even possible to plant specifically for them because each butterfly species has its favorite flower.

For example, the nectar of the Buddleia (Butterfly bush) attracts the Giant Swallowtails and the Painted Ladies. Asters attract the Common Sulphur and Buckeye.

With even more careful selection, you can provide for butterflies’ full life cycle—from egg, to caterpillar, to chrysalis, and finally to the emergence of a full-fledged butterfly. For some species the process only takes a few weeks.

Eggs are laid on specific food plants so that when the caterpillars emerge, they can begin to feed. Food source plants are often different from nectar sources. The Monarch butterfly is a good example of this. They only lay eggs on Milkweed, and then the plant becomes the food source for the caterpillar. As an adult, the Monarch sips from the Milkweed but also likes other flowers as well.

Milkweed nectar attracts a number of different butterflies like the Giant Swallowtail, Cabbage White, Fiery Skippers. But these other species all lay eggs on other types of plants.

The relationship between plants and butterflies is tight and complex. They are flowers’ greatest pollinators. Development, though, is diminishing their habitats, but with gardens that favor butterflies we contribute to their safety.

Plants that butterflies like include—\*Dalea purpurea (Purple Prairie Clover)

\*Echinacea (Conflowers)

\*Gaillardia grandiflora (Blanket Flower)

\*Helianthus maximiana Lemon Yellow

\*Lavandula, different species

\*Monarda (Beebalm)

\*Salvia, different species

\*Sedum ‘Ruby Glow’, ‘Autumn Joy’ and others

So enjoy these garden delights and don’t forget that a pesticide free garden is crucial to sustaining all butterfly populations.

# Gardening to Attract Butterflies

**It’s such a pleasant surprise when a butterfly happens into a garden. But having butterflies fluttering around doesn’t have to be a hit and miss thing...**

It’s such a pleasant surprise when a butterfly happens into a garden. But having butterflies fluttering around doesn’t have to be a hit and miss thing. You can actually plan for them. And attracting butterflies is not difficult.

Equipped with a finely tuned sense of smell, butterflies can identify their favorite plants from miles away and will sometimes travel for hours just to take a sip of nectar. Even a planter attached to the windowsill can bring butterflies.

The key to any butterfly garden is making the right selection of flowers. Just by putting in a few plants such as Agastache neomexicana or Echinacea purpurea, you’re guaranteed to get a few butterflies. But if you have some favorite butterflies, it’s even possible to plant specifically for them because each butterfly species has its own favorite flower.

For example, the nectar of the Buddleia (Butterfly bush) attracts the Giant Swallowtails and the Painted Ladies. Asters attract the Common Sulphur and Buckeye.

With even more careful plant selection, you can also be assured of attracting butterflies for much of the season. There’s nothing like providing for their full growth cycle—from egg, to caterpillar, to chrysalis, and finally, to the emergence of a full-fledged butterfly. For some the process takes only a few short weeks.

Adult butterflies are very picky about where they lay their eggs. Eggs are laid on specific food plants so that when the caterpillars emerge from their eggs, they can begin to feed. In many cases food source plants are different from the nectar source. (It should be noted that a pesticide-free garden is very important for butterflies, especially when planting food plants for caterpillars.) So if you’re up for it, providing caterpillar food as well as nectar for adult caterpillars (butterflies) makes for an interesting challenge.

It’s generally known that the Monarch butterfly only lays its eggs on Milkweed, and that the plant becomes the food source for the caterpillar. As an adult, the Monarch will sip from the Milkweed but also turns to other flowers for nectar. However, the Milkweed nectar attracts a number of different butterflies like the Giant Swallowtail, Cabbage White, Fiery Skippers. But these other species all lay eggs on other types of plants.

The relationship between plants and butterflies is tight and complex. When butterflies suck nectar as food, traveling from flower to flower, they carry pollen with them and fertilize the plants. It’s one of the finest natural cycles. And sadly this cycle is slowly being lost. In a little book that’s unfortunately out of print, Creating a Butterfly Garden, author Marcus Schneck says: “Humankind’s legacy to the butterfly has largely been one of destruction and devastation. Most species are intensely tied to their environments and cannot withstand our ever-growing pressures of development and land consumption.”

What happens when we create a garden for butterflies is we also participate in their conservation. If we can create a natural habitat for them, we are ensuring their safety.

Following are some perennials that attract butterflies by providing nectar. For a more detailed list, stop by Santa Fe Greenhouses and pick up one of our catalogs. The central index of the High Country Gardens catalog includes a more comprehensive list of plants that provide nectar for butterflies.

### Plants

* Dalea purpurea (Purple Prairie Clover)
* Echinacea purpurea, E. angustifolia, E. paradoxa (Purple Coneflower)
* Gaillardia grandiflora (Blanket Flower)
* Helianthus maximiana Lemon Yellow
* Lavandula, different species
* Monarda (Beebalm)
* Salvia, different species
* Sedum ‘Ruby Glow’, ‘Autumn Joy’ and others

To ensure the availability of nectar sources throughout the summer, long-blooming annuals such as cosmos, verbena, lantana, penta, strawflower and heliotrope can be planted between the perennials or in potted container gardens.

Though flower nectar is the chief food source for most butterflies, a few butterfly species prefer to feast on rotting fruit (Mourning Cloaks especially) and all will hang around mud holes, a characteristic called ‘puddling.’ Mud is a source of mineral salts

It takes a little thought to design a garden for butterflies, but the time spent can turn your yard into a home for many different species. They’ll offer you hours of enjoyment and in turn you’re helping the environment.