

A Butterfly Garden

Beautiful colors and graceful flight distinguish butterflies as one of nature's most delightful creatures. A butterfly garden is an easy way to both see more butterflies and to contribute towards their conservation, since many natural butterfly habitats have been lost to urbanization and other development.

A successful butterfly garden has plants that meet butterfly needs during all four life stages: eggs, caterpillar, chrysalis and adult. It is easy to increase the number and variety of butterflies in your yard. Simply grow the plants that caterpillars like to eat and plants that adult butterflies like to feed on. Transforming part of your yard into a butterfly garden will also invite other beneficial insects into your yard.

How Does it Help the Environment?

Butterflies themselves are an important part of the ecosystem, and can pollinate many plants. It's important to conserve butterflies when possible since their habitat is constantly diminishing due to the increasing development of roads and housing.

If you plant a butterfly garden where there used to be lawn, there is less grass to mow, which means less work, with the lawn mower as well as less air and noise pollution if your mower runs on gas. Butterflies like lots of different plants, so creating a garden adds biological diversity to your yard. Diversity can reduce populations of pest insects by making it harder for them to find their host plants.

Use plants native to our region in our butterfly garden. Typically, native plants require less water and fertilizer than non-native species, and many are naturally resistant to pests.

Create Your Own Butterfly Garden

Butterflies like:

- Sunny locations
- Shelter from wind
- Nectar-rich blooms
- Host plants where they can lay eggs
- Moist sand or mud for "puddling"
- Flat rocks or other light-colored flat surfaces for basking

You can attract butterflies to your garden by providing them with food (plants and flowers), water, shelter and places to lay their eggs (host plants). Butterflies drink nectar, so growing nectar-rich flowers will attract butterflies to your garden. Also, when their eggs hatch, the caterpillars eat the foliage of the plant they were laid on. Growing the right type of plants to feed caterpillars is important, since it will allow female butterflies to lay their eggs in your garden.

Location

Plant your butterfly garden in a sunny location (make sure it gets 5-6 hours of sun each day), but one that is sheltered from the wind. Butterflies like all insects, are cold-blooded and cannot regulate their body temperature internally. They are active during the warmest parts of the day and will bask in the sun, so it is a good idea to leave open spaces in your yard for butterflies to sun themselves.

Butterflies prefer temperatures of 70-85 degrees, and don't want to feed in an area where they are constantly fighting the wind to stay on the plants. You should try to position your garden on the south side of your house in full sun, if possible.

When planning your garden, don't forget a nice observation spot for yourself so you can enjoy the results of your work! This will allow you to enjoy the entire life cycle of the butterfly. The diversity of size, shape, color, patterns and behavior make these delicate winged creatures a delight to see.

Food

Nectar-producing flowers are the primary food source for butterflies. They will attract a wide variety of butterflies and are easy to grow in Massachusetts. It's important to know which adult butterflies are found in your area. This will help you determine the plants you select when creating your butterfly garden.

Butterflies are active from early spring through frost, and having a mix of plants in your garden that flower throughout the entire time will attract them all season long.

Try to incorporate a variety of plants with a variety of heights and bloom times. For best results, plant the tallest flowers behind the shorter ones – so you'll be able to see all the flowers and butterflies that appear in your garden.

Butterflies appear to be attracted to areas with large masses of color, or closely related colors, rather than gardens with many colors mixed together. Groups of the same plants will be easier for butterflies to see than singly planted flowers. A wide variety of food plants will result in the greatest diversity of visitors.

Water

Water attracts butterflies. After rain, for example, you might see them “puddling” or sucking fluids from wet soil to obtain water and salts. Stones with depressions that collect rainwater are an excellent water source for butterflies; they will encourage them to linger in your yard, and should not be filled deep or long enough for mosquitoes to breed. You can also bury a shallow bowl to its rim and fill it with sand and enough water to make the sand moist.

Maintenance

The use of pesticides will kill many butterflies and caterpillars. If a pest problem develops in your garden, try using biological controls, such as ladybugs, lacewings and preying mantis as a first line of defense.

Suggested Plants and Flowers

(“H” indicates host plant for caterpillars, other are nectar sources)

Aster	Goldenrod	Annuals
Bee Balm	Ironweed	Cosmos
Black-eyed Susan	Lobelia	Globe Amaranth
Blue False Indigo (H)	Milkweed (H)	Marigold, French
Boltonia	Mountain Mint	Mexican Sunflower
Butterfly weed (H)	Phlox	Nasturtium
Chives	Sage	Parsley (H)
Coneflower	Sedum	Sunflower
Coreopsis	Turtlehead (H)	Verbena
False Indigo	Verbena	Zinnia
Gayfeather		