

Welcome Your Friends with Flowers

by Dan Dinelli, Northshore C.C.

Flowers are often used as a warm gesture of friendship, welcoming family and friends. Plants in the garden can do the same. Gazing at the floral spectrum of colors and texture of a garden in full bloom puts us at ease. Plants offer more than their kaleidoscope of beauty. Many forms of wildlife are attracted to flowers.

When selecting plant material for the golf course, we consider benefits the plants offer wildlife. As I look at our greenhouse bulging with annuals and perennials, the same holds true. Flowers welcome friends to the garden like butterflies, fascinating moths, beneficial insects and birds, including the elusive hummingbird. Flowers offer food, nectar, seeds, protection and breeding habitat that lures these fine critters to the garden. Many of the flowers we use in our formal annual beds and informal wildflower/prairie plantings have proven themselves as "welcome mats" to our garden friends.



Carrie Dinelli

Butterflies are said to be flowers that fly. My ever active two year old daughter becomes paused, as her eyes wander freely with the flight of a butterfly. Plants attract butterflies not only with their sweet nectar but by providing the appropriate environment for various stages of their development. The infamous, frail winged Monarch that migrates hundreds of miles to Mexico is nicknamed the milkweed butterfly. The larva feeds on the milkweed plant. The toxic sap in the milkweed poses no threat to the larva. However, if a predator attempts to eat the larva, the predator quickly drops the caterpillar due to the taste of the toxin.

To fully understand the needs of a butterfly, you must first know the life cycle of the butterfly. Butterflies develop by complete metamorphosis. They begin their life as an egg, develop into a larva (caterpillar), form a chrysalis or pupa and finally emerge as a winged adult. When laying her eggs the female butterfly must choose the appropriate plant. Many caterpillars or larva will survive only if they feed on a particular species of plant. To encourage butterflies, plantings should include the proper host for egg laying and larva development.

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Other plants offering larva food would be the asters for the Pearl Crescent butterfly. Snap dragons for the Buckeye butterflies and Queen Anne's Lace for the beautiful Swallowtail. Do not be offended when the plants foliage is eaten. The caterpillars rarely kill the plant. Pesticides should be avoided.

Nectar of many flowers will attract these beautiful aviators to the garden. A relative of the milkweed is the Butterfly weed. It grows well in a sunny well-drained site. If the area is moist with partial to full sun, one of my favorites is the Joe Pye-weed. Though these names end in weed, to the butterflies they are not weeds at all. The following is a partial list of garden flowers that attract a variety of butterflies. Ageratum, Aster, Baptisia, Bee Balm, Black-eyed Susan, Butterfly weed, Cornflower, Coreopsis, Cosmos, Daylily, Daisy, Delphinium, Goldenrod, Lupine, Marigold, Pansy, Phlox, Primrose, Purple Coneflower, Petunia, Snap dragon, Sweet William, Verbena, White Alyssum, Yarrow, and Zinnia.



Upon close inspection of nectar rich flowers, one may find insects like the Hover or Syrphid fly, Predatory wasps (Vespidae family), Ladybugs or Ladybird Beetles, Green Lacewings. The appearance of these tiny beneficial insects may not be brilliant. Their beauty lies in their ability to patrol the garden for pests. For these insects pose no harm to humans. To destructive pests like aphids, mealybugs, thrips, leaf hoppers and mites they are relentless predators. These 'good guys' are the custodians of the garden, by either consuming their victims eggs, larvae or adult. The nectar of Cosmos, Coreopsis, Daisy, Marigold, Yarrow, Goldenrod, White Sweet Alyssum, Morning Glory and Queen Anne's Lace will lure the good guys in for a drink.

The only hummingbird found east of the Mississippi River is the Ruby-throated. These smallest of all birds are particularly attracted to tubular red flowers such as salvia and nicotiana. With their remarkable flight, they are the only birds that can fly backwards. Bee Balm, Monarda, Cardinal flower, Lobelia, Wild Bergamont, Columbine, Thistle, Impatiens, Lilies, Petunia, Hosta Sweet William, Butterfly weed are other flowers visited by hummingbirds.

The impostor of the hummingbird is the Sphinx Moth. This moth draws nectar of the same flowers as the hummingbird. These stout moths have swift, powerful wings that often have colorful patterns. Their long proboscis and rapid wing beat, causes this moth to look very much like a hummingbird at a glance. Attracting this moth to the garden may help in reducing weeds. For the larva feed on common weeds such as Chickweed and Purslane.

Many birds can be seen as they hunt for insects among the plants. Thrushes and wrens will hunt for ants, beetles, caterpillars, crickets, and weevils. Sparrows and vireos will feed on seeds from flowers or weeds. Finches are attracted to the seeds of Goldenrod, Cornflower, Zinnia and Thistle.

When arranging your garden, it is best to work from a plan. There are vines, shrubs, and trees that can be used in con-

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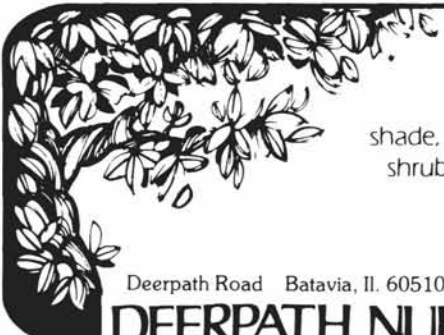
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junction with your annuals and perennials. With careful selection you will increase your success attracting wildlife. Remember, plants satisfy some but not all the needs of your garden guests. In many cases houses, feeders and bird baths can help greatly. Many references are available on attracting wildlife to your garden. Consider welcoming your guests with flowers. Sharing your garden will open another world beyond its floral beauty.



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Credit: "No Ordinary Time", by Doris Kearns Goodwin

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