

Bringing butterflies to the garden

Add a new dimension to your flower beds by attracting butterflies with particular nectar plants and techniques.

By TONY BERTAUSKI

Perennial flower beds can add so much to the value of homes, businesses or golf courses. They provide soft textures against the hard angles of buildings, splendid colors that catch our eyes, and wonderful fragrances. With a few mindful adjustments you can increase another dimension to your next perennial flower bed design. Using certain plants and gardening techniques, you could attract more of nature's beautiful pollinators: butterflies.

The first step is to locate the flower garden in a sunny location. Butterflies thrive in well lit gardens. Shade gardens are not effective because butterflies need the sun to regulate their body temperature. There should, however, be some shade available for

the butterflies to seek relief from hot, summer days. This can be achieved by planting small to medium size shrubs along the north side of the garden.

Shrubs and nearby trees also provide a protective wind break. A garden located in the middle of a pasture will often be subject to sweeping winds that make it hard for butterflies to flutter from one plant to the next. Groupings of woody plants create a calm, micro-climate that butterflies will be drawn to and stay for a longer period of time.

There is no shortage of the variety of plants that attract butterflies (Table 1). The plants that attract butterflies will do so for two reasons. One is for nectar. Butterflies feed themselves on the sweet, sugary nectar that plants provide. It is good to plant groups of each species in the garden instead of spreading out the plants throughout. These groups will have greater appeal to passing butterflies and encourage them to skip easily from plant to plant.

Another reason why certain plants attract butterflies is to provide a food source for the larvae stage (Table 2). Butterflies will seek out particular plants to lay their eggs upon so that when the larvae hatch they have an immediate food source. For instance, Monarch larvae only feed on milkweed plants. Thus eggs of the Monarch will be found on milkweed plants. It is just as important to include food plants as well as nectar plants in your garden design.

Do some research about the butterflies indigenous to your area of the country. There are many species that can be found in most of the United States, such as Monarchs and Cabbage Whites. However, each area is different. Check books at the library or contact the entomology department at a local university. Choose your plants according to the butterflies you expect to find in your area.

There are a few additional things you can do to cater to behavioral characteristics of butterflies. One is to add groups of large rocks within the garden. Butterflies use warm rocks to regulate their temperature or to dry their wings. Most often but-

cont. on page 22G

TABLE 1. A PLANT LIST FOUND IN TEMPERATE ZONE 5 THAT PROVIDES NECTAR TO ATTRACT BUTTERFLIES.

PERENNIALS	ANNUALS	TREES/SHRUBS
Aster	French Marigold	Birch
Bee Balm	Hibiscus	Dogwood
Blanket Flower	Mexican Sunflower	Elm
Butterfly Weed	Sweet Pea	Hackberry
Coneflower	Salvias	Hawthorn
Gayfeather	Verbena	Hornbeam
Red Valerian	Zinnia	Lilac
Pincushion Flower	Poplar	
Phlox	Privet	
Viburnum	Willow	

cont. from page 20G

terflies can be found sunning themselves in the early morning hours when the air is cool and dewy.

Add a source of water

Butterflies cannot drink from pools of water. They get their moisture and nutrient requirements from sipping water from damp, often muddy, areas. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as "puddling." Swallowtails and Sulphurs can often be found in groups puddling. Some of the best places to find butterflies is at golf courses where equipment is continually washed off. This area always has piles of wet, muddy grass clippings that are perfect for butterflies to swarm around and feed.

We can address this behavior by creating a damp area in the garden. There are several creative approaches to this. One is simply burying a clean oil pan with top of the pan level with the soil surface. The

pan is filled with a mixture of soil and sand. The oil pan will retain water, keeping a damp area around a bit longer. Another approach is to create a slight depression in the ground and line it with plastic then cover with a layer of decorative rock. Moisture will be present between the rocks for the butterflies to feed on, especially in the morning dew. It can also serve as an area to sunbathe in the afternoon.

With these simple ideas in mind when selecting and placing plants in your next perennial flower design, butterflies may be the additional dimension of wonder your clients behold. □

TABLE 2. FOOD PLANT LIST FOUND IN TEMPERATE ZONE 5 THAT LARVAE WILL FEED ON.

BUTTERFLY/LARVAE	PLANT
Black Swallowtail	Fennel, Parsley, Dill
Great Spangled Fritillary	Violets
Buckeye	Snapdragons, Verbenas
Pearl Crescent	Asters
Viceroy	Willow, Poplar, Plum and Cherry
Cabbage White	Nasturtium, Cabbage
Monarch	Asclepias

The author is assistant superintendent at Brookhill Golf Course, Rantoul, Il, and has published several articles concerning golf course maintenance.

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