

Creating a Butterfly Habitat

Butterflies are a fun and colorful addition to any garden. The following are some of the most common butterflies found in the Kansas City area.



✓ For colorful photos and detailed information on each one, go to our web site at www.johnson.ksu.edu and click **Lawn and Garden > Butterfly Gardening**.

If you want butterflies to be more than just visitors stopping by for nectar now and then, you can create a habitat that will encourage butterflies to call your garden their home. To do this, you need three things:

- **Nectar plants** to feed adult butterflies.
- **Host plants** for butterflies to lay their eggs and for developing butterflies to feed on.
- **Trees, shrubs or windbreaks** to provide protection from wind and predators.

Nectar Plants

The color, as well as the shape, of a flower's blooms attracts butterflies. While a wide variety of color will attract a greater variety of butterflies, it's also important to plant your flowers in masses using three or more plants of one variety.

Nectar plants include many perennials and annuals. **Perennials** bloom for three to eight weeks during the summer and return every year, usually in a larger clump than the previous year. **Annuals** grow and bloom all summer long but are killed by frost and must be replanted each year.

Following is a list of common nectar plants and their growing habits. Many are native to our area and are marked with ▲. Avoid buying newer hybrids. Their blooms tend to have reduced nectar supplies.

	Bloom Color	Bloom Time	Size	
Perennials				
Aster (<i>Aster</i>) ▲	Pink, blue, purple	Late summer - fall	12 - 36"	
Bee balm (<i>Monarda</i>) ▲	Pink, red	Early summer	24 - 36"	
Black-eyed Susan (<i>Rudbeckia</i>) ▲	Yellow	Mid - late summer	18 - 36"	
Blazing star/gayfeather (<i>Liatris</i>) ▲	Purple	Mid- summer	24 - 36"	
Catmint (<i>Nepeta</i>)	Blue, pink	Summer	1 - 3'	
Coneflower (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>) ▲	Purple, white	Mid- summer	24 - 36"	
Coreopsis (<i>Coreopsis</i>) ▲	Yellow	Early summer	12 - 24"	
Goldenrod (<i>Solidago</i>) ▲	Yellow	Late summer - fall	18 - 36"	
Joe Pye weed (<i>Eupatorium</i>) ▲	Pink, purple	Late summer - fall	3 - 6'	
Milkweed (<i>Asclepias</i>) ▲	Orange, yellow, red, pink	Summer - fall	24 - 48"	
Phlox (<i>Phlox paniculata</i>) ▲	Pink, purple, white	Mid- summer	24 - 36"	
Pincushion flower (<i>Scabiosa</i>)	Pink, blue	Summer	12 - 18"	
Sedum, tall varieties (<i>Sedum</i>)	Red, pink	Late summer - fall	18 - 24"	
Yarrow (<i>Achillea</i>) ▲	Yellow, red, pink, white	Summer	12 - 24"	
Annuals				
Alyssum (<i>Lobularia</i>)	Purple, pink, white	All summer	4 - 6"	
Globe amaranth (<i>Gomphrena</i>)	Purple, pink, red, white	↓	10 - 18"	
Heliotrope (<i>Heliotropum arborescens</i>)	Purple, blue		12 - 18"	
Verbena (<i>Verbena bonariensis</i>)	Purple		24"	
Pentas (<i>Pentas lanceolata</i>)	Purple, pink, red, white		18 - 24"	
Cosmos (<i>Cosmos bipinnatus</i>)	Pink, white		24 - 36"	
French marigold (<i>Tagetes patula</i>)	Yellow, orange, white		10 - 24"	
Lantana (<i>Lantana camara</i>)	Yellow, orange, white, pink		Sprawling 24 - 36"	
Bloodflower (<i>Asclepias curassavica</i>)	Yellow, orange, red		24"	
Cosmos (<i>Cosmos sulphurus</i>)	Yellow, orange		24"	
Zinnia (<i>Zinnia elegans</i>)	Multicolored		12 - 24"	
Mexican sunflower (<i>Tithonia</i>)	Orange		36 - 48"	
Shrubs				
Lilac (<i>Syringa</i>)	Purple, blue, pink		Spring	4 - 12'
Mock orange (<i>Philadelphus</i>)	White		Spring	4 - 6'
Butterfly bush (<i>Buddleia</i>)	Purple, pink, red, white	Summer - fall	4 - 6'	
Abelia (<i>Abelia</i>)	White or pink	Summer	2 - 6'	
Blue spirea (<i>Caryopteris</i>)	Blue or purple	Late summer - fall	2 - 3'	
Spirea (<i>Spirea</i>)	White, red, pink	Spring - summer	2 - 6'	
Herbs				
	Bloom Color	Bloom Time	Size	

Chives (<i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>)	White, lavender	Spring - summer	12 - 18"
Dill (<i>Anethum graveolens</i>)	White	Summer	2 - 3'
Lavender (<i>Lavandula</i>)	Blue, lavender	Summer	1 - 2'
Marjoram (<i>Origanum majorana</i>)	White, pink	Summer	8 - 18"
Oregano (<i>Origanum vulgare</i>)	Pink, white	Summer	18"
Sage (<i>Salvia</i>)	Pink, red	Summer	18 - 24"
Thyme (<i>Thymus</i>)	Pink	Summer	2 - 12"
Fennel (<i>Foeniculum dulce</i>)	Yellow	Summer	2 - 4'

Host plants

While butterflies drink from a variety of nectar plants, they lay their eggs on specific host plants. Their caterpillars hatch and feed on them. By supplying both nectar and host plants, you encourage butterflies to reproduce and build a population in your yard. *Expect host plants to be partially eaten by developing butterflies!*

Following is a list of host plants for the butterflies on Page one, as well as other butterflies common to our area. For beginners, plant milkweed for Monarchs, and plant parsley, dill or fennel for Black Swallowtails.

	Caterpillar Species	Name of Plant	
Annual	Buckeye	Snapdragon, Linaria	
	Painted Lady	Hollyhock (<i>Alcea</i>)	
Both Annual and perennial	Monarch	Milkweed (<i>Asclepias</i>)	
	Painted Lady	Thistles (<i>Echinops</i>)	
Perennial	Blues, Sulphurs	Clover family	
	Painted Lady	Thistles (<i>Echinops</i>)	
	Painted Lady, Common Hairstreak	Mallow (<i>Malva</i>)	
	Pearl Crescent	Aster	
	Question Mark, Comma, Red Admiral	Nettles (<i>Urtica</i>)	
	Sulphur, Gray Hairstreak, Eastern Tailed Blue	Partidge Pea (<i>Cassia</i>)	
	Sulphurs	Senna (<i>Cassia</i>)	
Perennial vine	Comma	Hops (<i>Humulus</i>)	
	Pipevine Swallowtail	Pipevine (<i>Aristolochia</i>)	
	Silver-Spotted Skipper	Wisteria	
Herbs	Black Swallowtail	Carrot family: Parsley, dill, fennel, rue	
Shrub	Giant Swallowtail	Prickly Ash (<i>Aralia</i>)	
	Spicebush Swallowtail	Spicebush (<i>Lindera</i>)	
Tree	Gray Hairstreak	Hawthorn (<i>Crataegus</i>)	
	Hackberry, Tawny Emperor, Question Mark	Hackberry (<i>Celtis</i>)	
	Mourning Cloak, Question Mark, Comma	Elm (<i>Ulmus</i>)	
	Red-Spotted Purple, Mourning Cloak	Poplar (<i>Populus</i>)	
	Silver-Spotted Skipper	Black Locust (<i>Robinia</i>)	
	Tiger Swallowtail	Ash (<i>Fraxinus</i>), Magnolia, Tulip (<i>Liriodendron</i>)	
	Tiger Swallowtail, Red-Spotted Purple	Black Cherry (<i>Prunus</i>)	
	Viceroy	Willow (<i>Salix</i>)	
	Zebra Swallowtail	Pawpaw (<i>Asimina</i>)	
	Vegetable	Cabbage White	Cabbage family

Trees, Shrubs and Windbreaks

Butterflies prefer a sunny location that is protected from the wind. The ideal area is an area that receives at least six hours of sun a day and is sheltered by a natural tree or shrub windbreak, fence or wall is ideal. Trees in the area also offer butterflies places to roost and provide protection from storms and predators.

More Ways to Make Butterflies Feel at Home

- **Add a few light-colored stones** protected from the wind on which the cold-blooded butterflies can bask in the sun.
- **Provide a "puddling" space** by burying a shallow container of sand and keeping it moist. The butterflies will congregate on damp sand to extract needed salts and minerals.
- **Place rotting or overripe fruit in a hanging basket** to attract Red-Spotted Purples, Viceroys, Question Marks, Commas, Hackberries and Red Admirals. Add fruit every few days.

Garden Maintenance

A successful butterfly garden requires a few special maintenance practices.

- **Avoid pesticide use.** The chemicals that kill undesirable insects will also kill butterflies and their caterpillars.
- **Deadhead spent blossoms.** Not only will this practice encourage more blooms, it also helps control plants that can become invasive by removing seed heads.
- **Allow a little debris in your garden area.** Many butterflies spend the winter as caterpillars and pupas in woodpiles, decaying branches, fallen leaves and the dead stalks of perennials. Meticulous fall cleanup can diminish the butterfly population the following spring.
- **Create a butterfly-friendly lawn.** Set your mower on the highest setting so tiny caterpillars in the lawn are not disturbed. Also, allow white clover to grow and bloom. This nectar and host plant provides nitrogen to the lawn as well as food for butterflies.

Sources

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Websites www.monarchwatch.org
www.grownative.org;
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Garden Questions

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