

The Lifecycle of Butterflies

Butterflies begin life as an egg. Most eggs are very tiny and barely visible with the naked eye. Butterflies lay their eggs on the larval host plant: that means they lay their eggs on the plant that the caterpillar will eat and live on until it forms its chrysalis. When the egg hatches, the caterpillar is very tiny, indeed. It is vital that if you find a caterpillar to leave it alone. Caterpillars are EXTREMELY sensitive to fertilizers and pesticides: do not purchase plants or seeds that have been treated with harmful chemicals! Please do not use any harmful chemicals where caterpillars might be living. After a week or two the larva, or caterpillar, will form a chrysalis. It will morph in the chrysalis for about two weeks. When it comes out it will be a beautiful, full-sized butterfly. It will dry its wings for many minutes to hours before it is able to fly. When it is in this stage, it is helpless prey to birds and other insects. It will be able to fly soon and will be seeking nectar. Most butterflies live for only a few weeks or months. They must complete the cycle before dying or falling prey to a bird, praying mantis or windshield.

Most butterflies die in the winter leaving their larvae or eggs in the dead leaves to emerge in spring. Our only north-south migrating butterfly is the colorful and familiar Monarch. Please grow any of the many varieties of milkweed to provide their larval host plant.



Exotic plants and cultivar varieties **may not produce** the needed nectar for our native butterflies. Many are unfamiliar to butterflies or have structure that they cannot access. Please try to install native plants for caterpillars and adult butterflies. Once established, native plants require no watering or fertilizing. Native plants also reduce soil erosion and help clean contaminants from the soil. This makes for a healthier planet. *It just makes sense!*

Things you can do to attract butterflies to your yard or garden:

Provide sheltered areas from wind. Butterflies are very fragile creatures and must find shelter on windy days. This can be a shrub or clump of grasses to provide some blockage from strong winds.

Provide at least 6 hours of sunlight per day. Butterflies need sunlight to keep warm. Many will land on mulch or soil spreading their wings open to capture the warm rays of the sun.

Plant large, diverse groupings of flowering plants. Butterflies are attracted to mass plantings of colorful flowers. They nectar on many species, but **native plants** provide them with the **most** nectar.

Incorporate a wide variety of color, height and structure. Different butterflies are attracted to different colors and some prefer higher blossoms, others closer to the ground. To attract a variety of butterfly species, plant a variety of flowering plants.

Create mud. Butterflies cannot drink water! They must suck the moisture from or mud puddles. Often you will see many butterflies “puddling”; this is usually a group of males acquiring minerals from the mud. Providing rotting fruit will lure many butterflies, too. They get minerals, sugar and moisture from it.

Create basking and landing sites. By providing large rocks, tree stumps or a dry birdbath in sunny areas: you will give the butterflies a place to warm themselves in the sun.

Provide a wide variety of HOST PLANTS for butterflies to lay their eggs on. Without host plants, butterflies will not remain in your yard for very long.

Be sure to leave some dead wood in your yard (brush piles, branches and trees) as a wide variety of insects will find food and shelter here while breaking down the organic matter of the wood. Many will become food for birds, too.



Butterfly Gardening



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Naturally Native Nursery is **the** major provider of native seed, potted plants, flowers, grasses, trees, vines and shrubs, specializing in landscape design and installation for homeowners, businesses and schools in the Midwest region.

 Here are some of the many native plants that will provide adequate nectar for adult butterflies in our area:



Clouded Sulphur butterfly on Woodland Sunflower



Blue Vervain



Golden Alexanders



Wild Geranium



Joe Pye Weed



Tiger swallowtail on Blazing Star

*Buy Locally Grown,
Organic Native Plants*



Giant Sunflower



Wild Columbine



Smooth Aster



Blue-eyed Grass



Whorled Milkweed



Prairie Coreopsis



Painted Lady on Brown-eyed Susan



Cardinal Flower



Blue Lobelia



Butterflyweed



New England Aster



Monarch on Tall Ironweed

Butterfly Favorites!

- Asters, all
- Boneset, all
- Gray-headed coneflower
- Susans, all
- Cardinal flower
- Compass plant
- Purple coneflower
- Coreopsis, all
- Cup plant
- False aster
- Prairie dock
- Ohio spiderwort
- Sunflowers, all
- Mountain mint, all
- Nodding wild onion
- Obedient plant
- Joe-Pye weed, all
- Blazing stars, all
- Tall Ironweed
- Milkweeds, all
- Purple prairie clover
- Vervains, all
- Wild bergamot
- Rattlesnake Master
- Wild columbine
- Goldenrods, all (goldenrods do not cause hay fever or sneezing!)
- ...and many more

*Text and photos by Jan Hunter
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