



**GARDEN  
FOR WILDLIFE™**

# Attracting Butterflies

Butterflies and native flowering plants have co-evolved over thousands of years and depend on each other for survival. Native plants provide butterflies with nectar and also serve as host plants for their caterpillars.

You'll have the most success at attracting butterflies if you plant both native nectar plants as well as caterpillar host plants. Some plants serve both purposes.

Get a list of the native plants that support the most number of butterfly and moth species by serving as host plant for their caterpillars using our Native Plant Finder at [nwf.org/NativePlantFinder](https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder).

Find out more about planting native flowering plants at [www.nwf.org/Garden-For-Wildlife/About/Native-Plants.aspx](https://www.nwf.org/Garden-For-Wildlife/About/Native-Plants.aspx).

These tips will help you create a beautiful garden filled with butterflies.

**MONARCH BUTTERFLIES  
HAVE DECLINED BY  
ALMOST 90 PERCENT  
IN JUST THE LAST FEW  
DECADES. YOU CAN HELP  
REVERSE THIS DECLINE  
BY PLANTING NATIVE  
FLOWERING PLANTS  
INCLUDING MILKWEED,  
THE ONLY HOST PLANT  
USED BY MONARCH  
CATERPILLARS.**

# Tips & Info

## Butterfly Garden Tips

- 1. Plant for continuous bloom.** Butterflies need nectar throughout the adult phase of their life span. Plan your wildlife garden so that when one plant stops blooming, another begins to provide nectar continuously from spring, through summer and into fall. These regional guides list multi season native nectar providing plants monarchs and other butterflies rely on: [www.nwf.org/monarch-nectar-guides](http://www.nwf.org/monarch-nectar-guides).
- 2. Plant natives.** Native plants are the best way to attract butterflies because they offer the food sources butterflies evolved with. You can supplement with non-invasive blooming annuals that provide nectar such as zinnias and sunflowers, or herbs that serve as host plants such as parsley and dill.
- 3. Avoid herbicides and pesticides.** These chemicals will kill butterflies and other beneficial insects in both their adult and larval phases, and herbicides kill off native plants that butterflies and caterpillars need.
- 4. Provide a place to rest.** Butterflies need sun to warm their wings for flight. Place flat stones in your garden to provide space for butterflies to rest and bask in the sun.
- 5. Provide cover.** Butterflies need cover from bad weather. Plant dense patches of wildflower and shrubs or build a brush pile to offer shelter.
- 6. Give them a place for puddling.** Butterflies often congregate on wet sand and mud to partake in “puddling,” drinking water and extracting minerals from damp puddles. Create a puddling area by mixing coarse sand and organic compost in a shallow pan and adding water to create mud.
- 7. Plant host plants.** Butterflies start out as caterpillars and without the specific host plants needed by caterpillars, butterflies cannot complete their life cycle. Birds rely on caterpillars as a primary food source for their young, so planting host plants will not only attract and support butterflies, but birds too.

## Common Butterflies & Select Native Plants

**American Painted Lady** – pearly everlasting, pussytoes, ironweed

**Black Swallowtail** - native and non-native herbs from the carrot family

**Coral Hairstreak** - wild cherry, wild plum, black chokeberry

**Eastern Tiger Swallowtail** - wild black cherry, ash, tulip tree, willow, sweetbay, basswood

**Gray Comma** - gooseberry, azalea, elm

**Gulf Fritillary** - passion vines including maypop

**Monarch** – milkweeds

**Morning Cloak** – willow, elm, aspen, birch and hackberry

**Skippers** – various native grasses and sedges

**Viceroy** - willows, cottonwood, aspen

**Zebra Longwing** – passion vines

**Search for butterflies and their native host plants for your area:**  
[nwf.org/NativePlantFinder](http://nwf.org/NativePlantFinder)



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## Join the Garden for Wildlife Movement!

Join the growing movement of people making a difference for wildlife where they live, work, learn, worship, and play! Just go to [nwf.org/garden](http://nwf.org/garden).

**Photo Credits:** Page 1: Fritillary, background - Heather Blank; Caterpillar, top right - Amy Golden; Swallowtail, middle - Jason Bidgood; Cocoon - Laura Pickett; Page 2: Monarch - Michele Eisele

