Butterflies & Butterfly Gardens

Butterflies go through several stages of life: egg, larva, pupa and adult. Most adult butterflies live only 2-3 weeks. Within this time they must find a mate, reproduce, seek and find shelter and avoid being eaten. There are several ways to encourage butterflies to visit our gardens. They need what are called “host plants” for the larva stage. Larva host plants provide shelter, camouflage, courtship areas and reproduction areas. They also need what are called “nectar plants”. These plants provide nectar throughout the butterflies’ adult life. Lastly butterflies need a source of minerals which they receive through “puddling”. Natural sites are along dirt roads and paths where water accumulates and evaporates regularly. This occurrence concentrates the minerals in the puddle. The majority of butterflies that are puddling are males. They are attracted to the salts/sodium that they require for mating, especially the 2nd mating.

There are several types of butterflies in our area:
Swallowtails, (Zebra, Tiger), Whites (Cabbages, Checkered), Sulfur (Clouded, Alfalfa), Coppers (American, Purplish), Hairstreaks (Brown Elfin, Gray), Blues (Spring Azure, Eastern Tailed Blue), Brushfoots (Buckeye, Mourning Cloak, Question Mark, Coma), Skippers (European Skipper, Silver Spotted Skipper), Milkweeds (Monarch), and Admirals (Viceroy, White Admiral).

This group of plants are host plants for butterfly larva and eggs

Perennials
Asters
Chelone
Cimicifuga
Clover
Helium
Lupines
Milkweed
Stonecrop

Grasses
Sedges
Crabgrass

Herbs
Borage
Fennel
Parsley
Pineapple Sage

Vegetables
Asparagus
Beans
Cabbage
Broccoli
Carrots

Shrubs
Dogwood
Spiraea
False Indigo

Sampling of top plants for this group.
Milkweed - Great Spangled Fritillary, Monarch
Meadowsweet - Spring Azure
Parsley - Black Swallowtail
Wild Black Cherry - Tiger Swallowtail
Lupines - Silvery Blue

This group of plants provide nectar for adult butterflies.

Perennials
Achillea
Arabis
Asclepias
Aster
Astilbe
Centauria
Chrysanthemum
Clematis
Coreopsis
Dianthus
Echinacea
Echinops
Gaillardia
Hemerocallis
Liatris
Lobelia
Nepeta
Phlox
Primula
Rudbeckia
Scabiosa
Sedum
Solidago
Veronica

Grasses
Sedges
Crab Grass
Calamagrostis

Annuals
Alyssum
Cosmos
Impatiens
Marigolds
Nasturtium
Verbena
Zinnias

Herbs
Chives
Lavender
Mint
Rosemary

Shrubs
Butterfly Bush
Lilac
Rhododendron
Viburnum

Sampling of the top plants from this group.
Butterfly Bush, Lilac - American Copper Blackeyed Susan - Baltimore/Pearl Crescent Liatris - Great Spangled Fritillary Joe Pye Weed, Purple Dome Aster - Monarch

Puddling areas should be in a sunny area of the garden. If you don’t have naturalized areas of puddles you can create your own. Simply take a container, dig a hole in the ground and place the container inside the hole and fill with rock or sand. Water the container thoroughly. You can keep it saturated with water, sweet drinks or stale beer. Butterflies will also be attracted to rotting fruit. Such as apples, bananas and oranges. This can be placed in a hanging container away from ants.
Sample plan for a Butterfly Garden in a sunny location.

Place taller plants to the back of the garden. Remember - don’t spray with insecticides.

Key to Garden Plan — A Large Butterfly Garden

1 = Tinkerbelle Lilac
2 = Aster Purple Dome
3 = Globe Thistle
4 = Joe Pye Weed
5 = Phlox Magic Blue
6 = Liatris Button Blazing Star
7 = Black Eyed Susan
8 = Phlox Paradise Blue
9 = Echineaca
10 = Monarda Petite Delight
11 = Phlox David
12 = Gaillardia Summers Kiss
13 = Marigold low variety
14 = Salvia Marcus
15 = Lantana
16 = Coreopsis Moonbeam
17 = Lavender Goodwin Creek
18 = Chives
19 = Bronze Fennel

For larger spaces more than one plant of a variety maybe necessary.