

“What joy awaits you, when the breeze // Hath found you out among the trees, // And calls you forth again!” William Wordsworth’s poem “To A Butterfly” invokes the rapture of spring time and the glory of butterflies. Butterflies are found nearly everywhere in the world except Antarctica. They have lived on Earth for at least 150 million years and range in size from smaller than a dime up to 11 inches in wingspan!

One purported origin of the word “butterfly” may have come from England, when people started calling the yellow Brimstone or the English sulfur a "butter-colored fly" because the pretty insect reminded them of the color of butter. Another notion is that butterflies were thought to land in kitchens and drink milk or butter if left uncovered (this is supported by a German word for butterfly, ‘milchdieb’ meaning "milk-thief").

Together with moths, butterflies make up over 150,000 species. There are over 700 species of butterflies in North America. They are in the order *Lepidoptera*, which means "scaly wings". This description of their wings and their bodies is accurate since butterflies are covered with tiny scales. Butterflies and moths are the only insects that have scales.

Consider planting a butterfly garden this spring. We have loads of butterflies in our area, and you might entice a Monarch or two from their yearly migration to Mexico. To plant a really successful butterfly garden, you will need two types of plants: nectar plants and host plants. Nectar plants are for food supplies and host plants are needed to shelter their eggs and larvae. Combining both types of plants will help you increase the numbers and varieties of butterflies to your garden

Butterflies love the sun. Since they have no internal way to increase their body temperature, they rely on the warmth of the sun to get them going. Placing a flat stone in your garden not only provides a spot for butterflies to bask to warm their wings on cool mornings but it can also add variety in texture and color to your garden. Most nectar plants require full sun, so it is a good idea to locate your garden where it will get plenty of sun and be seen by butterflies. By planting the flowers in bunches, you’ll help butterflies see them from a distance. To keep a steady stream of color and butterfly visitors to your garden, you’ll want to include a variety of plants that bloom at varying times throughout the summer.

Groups of male butterflies often congregate at puddles of water to drink. “Mud-puddling” offers them the opportunity to get the salt and amino acids they need. You can create your own puddle by digging a shallow depression in or near your garden. Line it with plastic, fill it with sand or gravel and add water.

Feeding butterflies can be as simple as placing a piece of overripe fruit like a banana, an orange, or a pear on a dish and either placing it on the ground or hanging it from a tree. Many species enjoy these snacks including: Question Marks, Red Admirals, Red-Spotted Purples, Mourning Cloaks, Malachites, Hackberries, Viceroy and Zebra Longwings.

Some plants to consider for your butterfly garden are: Blazing Stars or Gayfeathers. These plants have 2-3 inch purple, fluffy-looking plumes that open from top to bottom during the summer. It is an especially attractive plant for the Monarch, and the Gulf Fritillary. The Gulf Fritillary is similar in size to the Monarch, but can be distinguished by the large grey patches on the underside of the wing.

Zinnias are another good choice for your butterfly garden. These attractive large blooms are exciting to see and are available in an array of colors, shapes, and sizes. They are easy to care for in a sunny environment. The Zebra Swallowtail loves zinnias. It is readily identified by the yellow and black stripes.

Passion Flowers or Passion Vines have lovely blooms and rich green leaves. Be sure to have plenty of room for these climbers since they love to spread out and over anything they can reach. This vine attracts: Great Spangled Fritillary, Zebra Longwing, Variegated Fritillary, Julia Heliconian, Checkered White, Gray Hairstreak, Gulf Fritillary, and more.

Butterfly Milkweed is perfectly named; it is a brilliant orange butterfly magnet! It blooms beautiful clusters of flowers in the summer months. This plant is a must-have in every butterfly garden.

The Butterfly Bush has a variety of colors and is easy to care for. Planted in full sun, this bush will produce plumes of small flowers that butterflies will adore. The Red-spotted Purple is attracted to this plant. It has blue iridescent wings with vibrant orange spots on the underside of the wings. This is one of those aptly named plants, because butterflies cannot resist it!

With all their beauty and grace, butterflies are more than showy garden dances. For plants, butterflies pollinate, helping fruits, vegetables, and flowers to produce new seeds. For the animal kingdom, butterflies are near the bottom of the food chain and provide food (especially in their caterpillar stage) for birds, mammals, and other insects.

For now, let's dream a dream of spring and of winged visitors yet to come. Wordsworth says it so well - "We'll talk of sunshine and of [song](#), // And summer days, when we were young; // Sweet childish days, that were as long // As twenty days are now."