

# Gardening For Butterflies

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[www.massbutterflies.org](http://www.massbutterflies.org) – Website for The Massachusetts Butterfly Club. Visit it for butterfly information, pictures for help with identification of Massachusetts butterflies, field trip schedule (free and open to everyone), etc.

## BUTTERFLY GARDENING TIPS

There are lots of butterfly gardening books for reference. Sometimes the books are quite overwhelming, with detailed plans that may go beyond budget and manpower. A garden doesn't have to be big or even well planned to attract butterflies – the right kinds of flowers (not all flowers are nectar sources), some larval host plants, and some attention to the following points should bring success.

### A BUTTERFLY GARDEN SHOULD:

- have sunny areas ,
- be open with sheltered edges,
- have puddling areas,
- have basking areas (flat rocks),
- have nectar flowers (most important).

### NECTAR SOURCE CONSIDERATIONS:

- composite flowers,
- clusters of small flowers,
- fragrant, (day and night!)
- native,
- wildflowers (weeds!).

CHECK BOOKS AND LISTS (be careful of your area)

TRY TO HAVE SOMETHING IN BLOOM ALL THROUGH THE SEASON, ESPECIALLY EARLY AND LATE

### KINDS OF THINGS TO PLANT:

- trees,
- shrubs,
- annuals,
- perennials,
- vines,

LARVAL HOST PLANTS.

Peterson's First Guide to Caterpillars, Amy B. Wright. Features 120 of the most common species, with illustrations of adult butterflies and moths they become. Pupa, egg, and preferred food plant often shown to help identify caterpillars.

## PLANTING CONSIDERATIONS:

soil,  
drainage,  
height,  
soil conditions,  
bloom time,  
colors,  
MAINTENANCE.

PLANT FLOWERS IN LARGE BUNCHES IF YOU CAN.

**WILDFLOWER MEADOWS** (you can put one in or you can have an area where you put in some flowers and/or let the “weeds” grow freely.)

## DEADHEADING THE FLOWERS:

annuals (encourage longer bloom time),  
perennials (stop from spreading).

## OTHER ATTRACTIONS:

butterfly feeder (freshen frequently),  
rotting fruit (be careful of other insects),  
hibernation box (don't bother –these are better for wasp nests than for butterflies!)

## BE AWARE OF:

birds (not really a problem),  
caterpillars (you may want to encourage!),  
PESTICIDES (NO WAY!, DON'T USE!),  
butterfly flying times and life cycles (species differ as to when there are caterpillars and adults)

The Butterfly Book, and Easy Guide to Butterfly Gardening, Identification, and Behavior, Donald and Lillian Stokes and Ernest Williams – Color photos of butterflies in all life stages, and descriptions of the life cycles and behavior of 60+ common North American species. Complete list of nectar source plants as well as listings of larval host plants. Also includes well-illustrated section on caterpillar and adult butterfly identification.

## SOME COMMON MASSACHUSETTS BUTTERFLIES AND THEIR CATERPILLAR HOST PLANTS

Black Swallowtail	Carrot, Dill, Parsley, Rue, Queen Anne's Lace
Tiger Swallowtail	Variety of Trees and Shrubs
Spicebush Swallowtail	Sassafras, Spicebush
Cabbage White	Mustards, Cresses, Cabbage, Broccoli
American Copper	Sorrel, Curled Dock
Banded Hairstreak	Oaks, Walnuts, Hickories
Eastern Tailed-blue	Legumes, including Clovers and Vetches
Spring Azure	many woody shrubs and trees
Great-spangled Fritillary	Violets
Pearl Crescent	Asters
Question Mark	Nettles, False Nettle, Am. Elm
Eastern Comma	Nettles, False Nettle, Am. Elm, Hops
Mourning Cloak	Willows, Am. Elm, Aspens
Red Admiral	Nettles
American Lady	Everlastings, Pussytoes
Painted Lady	Thistles, Mallows, Everlastings
Red-spotted Purple	Cherries, Aspens, Apples, Plums
Viceroy	Willows, Aspens
Monarch	Milkweeds
Silver-spotted Skipper	Black Locust, Ground Nut
Skippers	Grasses, Sedges, Others

Butterflies Through Binoculars, A Field Guide to the Butterflies of Eastern North America, Jeffrey Glassberg – Shows how and where to find, identify, and enjoy the species that inhabit the Northeast. Provides photos of living butterflies in their natural poses and in correct size relationship to other species. Uses field marks for species identification and give basic natural histories of each species in highly readable style.

*These lists of plantings were compiled from several sources, and are by no means exclusive. Be sure to take into consideration all the planting issues (amount of sunlight, type of soil, surrounding plants, colors, heights, time and length of blooming, etc.) for greatest success.*

### **NATIVE WILDFLOWERS AND SHRUBS**

Milkweeds  
Meadowsweet  
Joe-pye Weed  
Dogbane  
Sweet Pepperbush  
Black-eyed Susan  
New Jersey Tea  
Mountain Mints  
Blueberry  
Smooth Sumac  
Asters  
Dandelion  
Goldenrod

### **NATURALIZED, NON-NATIVE WILDFLOWERS**

Yarrow  
Knapweeds  
Thistles  
Mints  
Queen Anne's Lace  
Oxeye Daisy  
Clovers

### **GARDEN FLOWERS: ANNUALS**

Cosmos  
Lantana  
Nasturtium  
Mexican Sunflower (Tithonia)  
Zinnia  
Verbena Bonariensis

### **GARDEN FLOWERS: PERENNIALS**

Coreopsis  
Coneflowers  
Phlox (many varieties)  
Bee Balm  
Sedums  
Liatris  
Butterfly Weed  
Yarrow

### **GARDEN SHRUBS**

Beauty Bush (*Kolkwitzia amabilis*)  
Butterfly Bush  
Privet  
Lilac

*Be aware of bloom time for shrubs and perennials. It is especially good to have early blooming and late blooming flowers.*

### **EXAMPLES OF LARVAL FOOD PLANTS (HOST PLANTS)**

Birch	Mourning Cloak, Tiger Swallowtail
Elm	Comma, Mourning Cloak
Poplar, Aspen, Cottonwood	Mourning Cloak, Viceroy, Red-spotted Purple, Tiger Swallowtail
Black Locust, Ground Nut	Silver-spotted Skipper
Spicebush, Sassafras	Spicebush Swallowtail
Blueberry	Spring Azure
Grasses, Sedges	Common Wood Nymph, European Skipper, Little Wood Satyr
Common Burdock	Painted Lady
Parsley, Dill, Carrots, Queen Anne's Lace, Bronze Fennel:	Black Swallowtail
Violets	Great-spangled Fritillary
Milkweeds	Monarch
Thistle	Painted Lady
Everlastings, Pussytoes	American Lady

*Here are some plants that I have in my yard, which are planted or allowed to stay to encourage butterfly populations. Many of the nectar sources also attract hummingbirds.*

**Phlox** – for nectar – find out when they bloom, I have a variety that blooms early and another variety that blooms late

**Queen Anne’s Lace** – for nectar and host plant for Black Swallowtail

**Bronze Fennel** – very popular host plant for Black Swallowtail

**Clovers** – for nectar

**Joe-pye Weed** – for nectar, late blooming

**Black-eyed Susan** –for nectar

**Cinquefoil** – for nectar

**Hawkweed** – for nectar

**Common Valerian** – for nectar, early blooming

**Daisy Fleabane** – for nectar

**Beauty Bush (Kolkwitzia amabilis)** – for nectar, early blooming

**Violet** – host plant for Great-spangled Fritillary

**Daisy** – for nectar

**Everlasting, Pussytoes** – host plant for American Lady

**Chives** – for nectar, early

**Blueberry bushes** –for nectar (early), host plant for Azure

**Lantana** – attractive annual nectar plant

**Milkweeds (Common Milkweed, Swamp Milkweed, Butterfly Weed)** – for nectar, host plant for Monarch

**Thistle** – for nectar, host plant for Painted Lady

**Nettles** – host plant for Red Admiral

**Sorrel, Curly Dock** – host plant for American Copper

**Dandelion** – for nectar (I deadhead after bloom)

**Ground Nut** – host plant for Silver-spotted Skipper

**Purple Coneflower** – for nectar (leave seedheads for Goldfinches!)

**Butterfly Bush** –f or nectar, an extremely popular flower, late blooming

**Liatris** – for nectar

**Grasses and sedges** – I let them grow in clumps, host plant for variety of skippers

**Verbena bonariensis** – tall, spindly plant, extremely popular nectar flower, late blooming

#### **Milkweed for Monarchs**

If you want to encourage Monarch butterflies, you might consider an out-of-the way spot to put in a patch of Common Milkweed. Collect seeds from pods in the fall, keep outside in a dry place over the winter. Start seeds in flats in the spring, put in the ground when established. The first year the plants will be small, but after it gets established, don’t be surprised if you find Monarch eggs or caterpillars on the plants!

You can also plant Swamp Milkweed (which doesn’t need to be in a swampy area), or Butterfly Weed. These don’t spread by root runners like the Common Milkweed.

The Milkweeds have beautiful nectar flowers and will most likely attract the female Monarch butterflies for laying eggs. Call me if you would like information about raising Monarch butterflies.