

Tips For Planting A Butterfly Garden

Butterflies are guided by the invisible world of scents and smells. Certain kinds of flowers give off a fragrance that butterflies find attractive, a signal that the plant may be a source of sweet nectar for the insects to feed on. It is believed that plants with purple, pink, yellow or white (single) flowers are the most attractive to butterflies.

Another key to attracting butterflies is to provide plants on which they will lay their eggs. Many of these plants are considered weeds, but there are acceptable surrogates in the same plant family that not only feed the caterpillars, but also look good in gardens. Butterflies are the adult stage of an insect that starts life as a creeping caterpillar. You may not like the creepy-crawly part, but remember: no caterpillar, no butterfly. If you use insecticides regularly in your garden, chances are that you may kill off these caterpillars before they can pupate and later develop into the very butterflies that you are trying to attract. Food sources for the caterpillars should also be planned for in the garden, and special attention paid to letting them develop and grow.

The best location for your butterfly garden is a **bright sunny area** with a bit of windbreak. They need at least **one or two medium sized flat** rocks so they can bask in the sunlight and the warmth of the reflection of the rock. Since they are cold-blooded they need warmth to help rise their body temperature before they can take off in flight.

They will also need a place to obtain **water and the essential nutrients and minerals** from the water. Specialists recommend you submerge a bucket in the soil, fill it with sand, then fill it with water to just below the surface and add just a little bit of salt on the surface. (Salt provides the sodium they need.) They need the moisture, but prefer the sand is moist, not wet.

Use quite a few plants in your plantings to provide the protection they need during inclement weather or at night. During those times they retreat to the undersides of the leaves of their favorite trees, shrubs and flowers. So plan the butterfly garden so it is almost as wide as it is long. This provides the proper protection and incentive for them to visit and maybe even stay for a while. Design the plantings to include a mix of low, medium and tall plants that overlap bloom times to provide flowers throughout the seasons. They also prefer **clusters of plants** over scattered, individual flowers. In other words, you want to create a planting similar to what would be nature's natural butterfly habitat.

It is a good idea to also plant a container that includes a mix of their favorite nectar plants and place it near the entry, on the patio or deck where you can more thoroughly enjoy them.