

KPOV – *The Point*
Gardening: Get Good At It
“Butterflies in Your Garden”
June 7, 2022

Butterflies are among the most popular insects out there. While a number of factors have led to population decreases, one of the most important is habitat loss. So, what can you do to make your landscape more attractive to butterflies?

Let's start with placing your butterfly garden in an area that receives at least 6-8 hours of direct sun. Most plants and flowers that are attractive to butterflies are going to do best in full sun.

You'll also need to provide some food - flowers. While butterflies may visit any type of flower, they tend to like flowers that are red, orange, yellow and purple. Butterflies have straw-like mouthparts and only feed on nectar, so choosing plants that provide ample nectar is important.

When it comes to selecting plants for your butterfly garden, native plants are the perfect choice because they are adapted to the local soil and climate. Also, native plants generally do not require fertilizers and require fewer pesticides for maintenance. They are less likely to become invasive and they promote local native biological diversity. As a result, they often perform better than nonnative species. You'll spend less money and effort to attract more butterflies in the long run.

Natives often have the reputation of looking unkempt or weedy. But there are many natives that are just as attractive as nonnative ornamentals such as bee balm and coneflower.

You also want to make sure you will have something blooming throughout the growing season. We tend to do a good job of having blooming plants during the summer but are often lacking in spring and fall. Plants such as goldenrod and asters are good options for fall.

Don't forget to group your plants by color. Large groupings of flowers will be easier for butterflies to find.

Later in the season you may venture out early in the morning before it starts to warm up and you'll commonly see butterflies basking in the sun. Butterflies do this because they need to be warm to fly. While they'll bask on any surface exposed to the sun, providing a large flat rock in direct sun will make your butterfly garden all that more attractive..

If you want to take your butterfly garden to the next level, incorporate plants that will act as larval (caterpillar) food sources. Having larval food sources is important if you want to attract and keep butterflies around long-term. Many butterflies will only feed on a few different types of plants. If there is a specific type of butterfly or moth you want to attract, it's a good idea to have its larval food source around too. It usually takes about two

weeks for a caterpillar to reach full size. Then it spends 10 to 14 days as a chrysalis before emerging as a butterfly

A great resource for planting and general landscaping for all types of pollinators will be linked on our website.

Next tip is to provide some sort of shelter for butterflies where they can hide during storms, strong wind and even overwinter. Trees and shrubs can make excellent windbreaks for your butterfly garden. They can also be a food source for both adults and caterpillars which are the larval state of the butterfly.

Lastly, when creating a butterfly garden, avoid herbicides and insecticides. Insecticides contain chemicals that will kill butterflies and other beneficial insects in both their adult and larval phases. Since caterpillars will feed on plants, you must be willing to accept some plant damage. Remember, the reason you're creating a butterfly garden is to provide food and shelter for these insects.

For answers to all your gardening questions, please visit our website: Gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good At It. Thanks for listening

RESOURCES:

<https://extension.illinois.edu/blogs/good-growing/2021-03-04-how-create-butterfly-habitat-your-garden>www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife

<https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/pubs/insect/05504.pdf>

www.butterfliesandmoths.org/ - to get a list of butterflies in your county