

## Perfect Time for Butterfly Gardening

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Are you drawn to the majestic wings of butterflies fluttering from flower to flower like I am? I get to delight in these wonders just by looking out my office window. As I write this article, I see Eastern black swallowtails, skippers, and bumblebees sipping away at the salvias, bush daisies, and golden dewdrop. Although butterflies are attracted to many different flowering plants, a successful butterfly, or pollinator, garden provides several other elements that often get overlooked.

In addition to the therapeutic elements of butterfly gardening, a well-planned garden can provide habitat conservation and food for natural enemies of plant pests, while also providing an opportunity to use native plants and attract other wildlife. Although a garden can be small, it can represent a sample of the surrounding habitat and provide a place for butterflies and wildlife to get shelter, food, and water, as well as reproduce and build their population.

There are four major components to a butterfly garden: adult nectar sources, larval host plants, shelter, and water. The nectar sources attract and nourish the adults and include a variety of flowering plants. The larval host plants attract female butterflies to lay their eggs and serve as a food source for the developing caterpillars. The shelter is vegetation that provides protection from environmental extremes, as well as protects them from predators and gives them a place to sleep. A shallow water bowl or a fountain gives them consistent access to water. A possible fifth component would be to place flat rocks around the garden as a resting spot.

A good butterfly garden design will include several elements. You should plant a mix of adult nectar sources and host larval plants. This will attract a larger variety of butterflies in your yard and keep them there as they go through their lifecycle. My favorite butterfly is the Eastern black swallowtail, mainly because I would plant parsley and dill which is a food source for the caterpillars and I would see generations of larvae chomp on my herbs. Unfortunately, they didn't leave much for me. I would often look at them and call them my "babies."

You should incorporate natives into your garden. Many of the host larval plants are natives, such as wild lime for the giant swallowtail, paw paw for the zebra swallowtail, partridge pea for the cloudless sulfur, and coontie for the atala, just to name a few. If you have a caterpillar munching on one of your landscape plants and think it is a pest, look it up, or contact the extension office, before you kill it because it may become a beautiful butterfly or moth. A great upcoming event for buying native plants is the Fall Native Plant Sale on Sept 30 and Oct 1 in Gainesville.

Choose plants that have different heights, colors, and shapes, and plant in groupings. You can even plant some in full sun or shade, depending on the plant, since many forest species prefer shade. By providing different heights, you give the butterflies microclimates and shelter. Different colors of flowers will attract different butterflies. Since butterflies have different length proboscis (mouthpart) depending on the species, provide various shapes such as a mix of long-tubed flowers and daisy-like flowers. Other wildlife, like bees and hummingbirds, will appreciate it as well.

If you are thinking about planting a butterfly garden or adding to it, give your plants a good start. Fertilize and mulch appropriately. Additionally, avoid pesticide applications if possible since we are trying to attract insects. Learn to tolerate the aphids on milkweed and encourage natural predators.

There are many resources on butterfly gardening and it is fun to learn what you have in the garden. Learn more about what to plant by attending my class, "Planting your Yard for Wildlife," on Sept 22 from 3pm to 4:30pm. It will include planting for butterflies, pollinators, birds, and hummingbirds. You can register through Eventbrite at <http://tinyurl.com/hgbwbs0> or call 352-955-2402.