

Caterpillar Food Sources

Providing food plants for the larval stage will attract butterflies in larger numbers and greater variety. Butterflies often lay their eggs on the host plant preferred by the caterpillar. Learn to recognize eggs (they are tiny!) and to identify caterpillars and ensure their survival. Accept chewed foliage; plants usually recover. Don't be too tidy – leave plants that may harbor eggs and chrysalises through the winter. Common butterflies and their food plants (some non-native) are:

American Lady – Thistles, pussytoes, ironweed, pearly everlasting and other composites

Black Swallowtail – Golden alexanders, meadow parsnip, parsley, dill, fennel and others

Buckeye – Plantain, gerardia, toadflax

Eastern Comma – Nettles, elm, hackberry

Eastern Tailed Blue – Legumes and clovers

Great Spangled Fritillary – Violets

Monarch – Milkweeds

Mourning Cloak – Willow, poplar, birch, elm

Pearl Crescent – Asters

Pipevine Swallowtail – Dutchman's-pipe, Virginia snakeroot

Question Mark – Hackberry, nettles

Red Admiral – Nettles

Red-spotted Purple – Wild cherry, willow, poplar

Skippers – Black locust, legumes, grasses

Spicebush Swallowtail – Spicebush, sassafras

Spring Azure – Dogwood and wild cherry flowers, viburnum, sumac, blueberries, New Jersey tea

Sulphurs – Clover and other legumes

Tiger Swallowtail – Tulip poplar, wild cherry, willow, birch, sweet bay magnolia

Variegated Fritillary – Passionflower, violets

Viceroy – Willow, poplar, fruit trees

Zebra Swallowtail – Pawpaw



Books

Attracting Birds, Butterflies & Other Winged Wonders to Your Backyard, Kris Wetherbee, 2004

Attracting Butterflies & Hummingbirds to Your Backyard, Sally Roth, 2001

Attracting Native Pollinators: The Xerces Society Guide, Protecting North America's Bees and Butterflies, 2011 (www.xerces.org)

Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants, Douglas W. Tallamy, 2009

Butterfly Gardening: Creating Summer Magic in Your Garden, Xerces Society and Smithsonian Institution, 1998

Caterpillars of Eastern North America, D.L. Wagner, 2005

Flora of Virginia, Alan S. Weakley, J. Christopher Ludwig & John E. Townsend, 2012

The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty & Biodiversity in the Home Garden, Rick Darke & Doug Tallamy, 2014

Kaufman Focus Guides, Butterflies of North America, Jim P. Brock & Kenn Kaufman, 2003

Native Plants for Northern Virginia, Plant NoVA Natives Campaign, 2017 (www.plantnovanatives.org; book available in PDF)

Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Backyard, Douglas W. Tallamy, 2020

Northern Virginia Butterflies and Skippers, Robert R. Blakney, 2017

Planting for Wildlife in Northern Virginia: A resource for enhancing wildlife habitat with native plants, Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy, 2019 (www.loudounwildlife.org)



Organizations

Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, www.audubonva.org

Butterfly Society of Virginia, www.butterflysocietyofva.org

Monarch Watch, www.monarchwatch.org

National Audubon Society, www.audubon.org

North American Butterfly Association, www.naba.org

Prince William Conservation Alliance, www.pwconserve.org

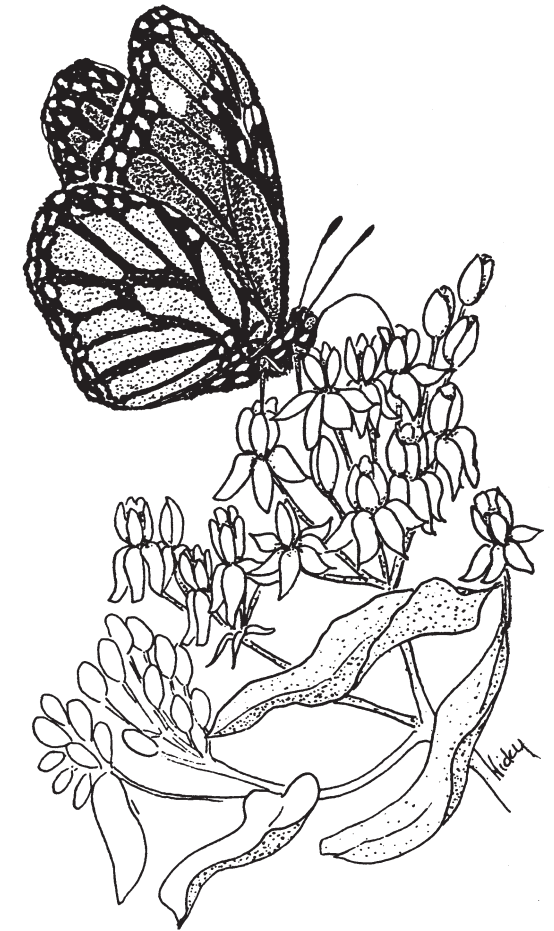
Prince William Wildflower Society, A Chapter of the VNPS, www.vnps.org/princewilliamwildflowersociety. Native plant sale in May, membership meetings, wildflower walks and other activities

Virginia Native Plant Society, www.vnps.org. Publishes list of suppliers of nursery-propagated native plants; has links to pollinator information and butterfly gardens

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Wildflowers for Butterfly Gardens



Prince William Wildflower Society
A Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

Gardens for Butterflies

Butterflies add an extra dimension of beauty to flower gardens, meadows, roadsides and other natural areas, and are important plant pollinators. Habitat destruction and the widespread use of pesticides have reduced their population in recent years, but fortunately for gardeners and nature lovers, it's easy to provide habitats for many species. Whether you're planning a wildflower meadow, a perennial garden devoted to butterflies, or just a few clumps of flowers to attract common species, the following steps will help:

Don't use pesticides. Even "natural" ones can kill butterflies and caterpillars. Instead, use integrated pest management practices such as hand-picking.

Locate the garden in a sunny protected area. Butterflies need sun to warm their wings and for orientation. Shelter from strong winds allows them to fly freely.

Observe butterflies in your area and plant the nectar-producing flowers they visit. Use a variety of flower shapes including the flat landing surfaces (daisies) and clusters of tubular blossoms (phlox) that they prefer. Native species and heirloom plants are more fragrant (another attractant) and have more nectar than hybridized flowers bred for showiness. Plant a variety of flowers using large splashes of color, which are easy for butterflies to spot. Plan for all-season bloom since butterflies are active from early spring until late fall and need a continuous supply of nectar. A few butterfly species also nectar on tree sap and rotting fruit.

Include caterpillar host plants. These lure females into the garden to lay eggs, provide food for the caterpillars and a place for them to pupate (form chrysalis).

Provide damp areas or shallow puddles. Some butterfly species extract salts from moist soil and large numbers will congregate around a puddle to drink.

Place flat stones in the garden for basking. Butterflies are cold-blooded and will sit on a stone or bare soil to bask in the sun, which raises body temperature and allows them to fly.

Nectar Flowers for Butterflies

These colorful Virginia wildflowers are excellent nectar sources for butterflies. Deadhead for continued flowering and/or to prevent unwanted seedlings. Unless noted, all prefer sun and well-prepared soil and can be grown in perennial gardens or wildflower meadows. Use nursery-propagated, not wild-collected, plants (see "Organizations" for sources).

Aster, New England (*Symphotrichum novae-angliae*) Lavender-blue flowers with yellow centers on 3-5' plants in August and September; likes a rich, moist soil. Smooth blue aster (*S. laeve*), Calico aster (*S. lateriflorum*), flat-top aster (*Doellingeria umbellata*), white wood aster (*Eurybia divaricata*) and other species and cultivars are also good nectar sources.

Bergamot, Wild (*Monarda fistulosa*) Fluffy lavender flowers on 3' plants in June and July. Adapts to poor, dry soil. Red beebalm (*M. didyma*) also attracts hummingbirds; needs slightly moist soil. Cultivars of both are available.

Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia* spp.) Familiar showy yellow daisies provide the flat landing surface butterflies prefer. A combination of annual, biennial and perennial species and cultivars will provide nectar from early summer until frost.

Blazing Star (*Liatris spicata*) Pinkish-lavender flowering spikes up to 4' tall in July. Pretty with purple coneflower and black-eyed Susans. Several other species are also attractive to butterflies.

Boltonia (*Boltonia asteroides*) Clusters of white daisies on 3-5' plants in the fall. 'Snowbank' is a compact cultivar.

Butterfly-weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) Grows about 2' tall and has clusters of red-orange flowers in June and July. Prefers a slightly dry, well-drained soil. A favorite of Monarchs and Great Spangled Fritillaries.

Cardinal Flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) Red 3' spikes in August and September. Needs extra moisture for best performance; will bloom in part shade; attracts hummingbirds. Blue lobelia (*L. siphilitica*) is also a good nectar source.

Coneflower, Purple (*Echinacea purpurea*) Pink flowers with orange cones on 3-4' plants June through September. Smooth Coneflower (*E. laevigata*) is also a good choice. Dried seedpods attract birds, especially goldfinches.

Cup Plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*) Yellow daisies on 6-8' plants in late summer and fall. Performs best in moist, rich, well-drained soil. A magnet for Swallowtails.

Goldenrod (*Solidago* spp.) Goldenrods provide color and nectar from mid-summer until frost. Usually considered a meadow plant, but many species and cultivars can be grown in the perennial garden including *Solidago sphacelata* 'Golden Fleece' and *S. rugosa* 'Fireworks.'

Ironweed (*Vernonia noveboracensis*) Brilliant purple flowers on plants that grow to 6' in damp meadows but can be kept lower by cutting stems back by half in early summer. Blooms July through September.

Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium* spp.) Grows to 8-10' in its native damp habitat but can be cut back by half in early summer for shorter blooming plants July through September. Pale pink flower heads are a favorite of many butterflies. 'Gateway' and 'Little Joe' are shorter growing cultivars. Also good for nectar are blue mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*) and white snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*).

Milkweed, Swamp (*Asclepias incarnata*) Pale pink flowers on 2-5' plants May through August. Prefers moist soil but will grow in ordinary garden soil. This and the common milkweed (*A. syriaca*) and butterfly-weed (*A. tuberosa*) are favorite nectar and larval food sources for the Monarch.

Mountain-mint, Short-toothed or Clustered (*Pycnanthemum muticum*) Clusters of small white flowers on 2-4' plants June through September; additional species will attract bees as well as butterflies.

Phlox (*Phlox* spp.) At 1' with lavender-blue flowers, wild blue phlox (*P. divaricata*) provides nectar in the spring woodland garden. Summer phlox (*P. paniculata*) has magenta flowers on 2-4' plants; other species and many cultivars are available in white and shades of pink and lavender.

Sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.) Good nectar sources from late summer until frost. Cut back by half in early summer for shorter blooming plants. Many annual and perennial species and cultivars are available.

Native shrubs providing nectar include azaleas (*Rhododendron* spp.), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) also host plant, summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*) and New Jersey Tea (*Ceanothus americanus*).