

Butterfly-Friendly Gardens

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Butterflies are some of the most beautiful creatures on the planet, but their existence is threatened by loss of habitat, pesticide use and pollution. A butterfly-friendly garden is an easy way to enjoy these creatures and help them in the process.

The life cycle of a butterfly is complex and must be considered in designing a butterfly-friendly garden. The cycle starts with the adult female depositing a fertilized egg on a carefully selected plant. A larva (or caterpillar) hatches from the egg and spends most of its time eating the leaves of the plant on which it hatched. As it eats, the larva grows and sheds its skin several times. When the larva finishes growing, it forms a protective casing around itself called a chrysalis. Inside the chrysalis, the larva is transformed. When the transformation is finished, an adult butterfly emerges.

Creating a butterfly-friendly garden starts with research on native butterflies. [Butterflies of the North Olympic Peninsula](#), a pocket guide written by local butterfly enthusiast, Kristi Murray Knowles, will help with this process. This guide which includes delicate pen and ink drawings is available at the Olympic National Park Visitor Center and many local bookstores.

Next, learn which flowers and plants those butterflies feed on. Adult butterflies dine on all sorts of nectar-producing flowers but are most attracted to those that are purple, bright pink, yellow, orange and red. A succession of flowers with different bloom times will ensure nectar throughout the growing season.

Because female butterflies lay their eggs on or near plants that later become food for the larva, to attract adults you must provide plants the larvae like to eat (called host plants), too. Host plants tend to differ among butterfly species. If you want to attract a particular type of butterfly, include host plants specific to that butterfly. The caterpillars will feed on these plants, so be prepared to tolerate some chewing damage.

In selecting plants, focus on native species because they will be easiest to establish and grow. (See sidebar.) Avoid exotic species, like Butterfly bush (scientific name: *Buddleia davidii*), which can be invasive and threaten native flora.

Because butterflies must supplement their nectar-rich diets with extra salts and nutrients, situate shallow saucers of mud on the ground throughout your garden; these will provide nutrient-rich gathering places for butterflies.

Place flat rocks in sunny areas to encourage butterflies to bask in your garden since they use sunlight to keep themselves warm.

Avoid the use of pesticides or herbicides in your garden, and remember, *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) (a bacterium commonly used as a biological alternative to pesticides) will kill any feeding caterpillar, not just the bad guys.

By offering the right food and comfortable surroundings, butterflies will be drawn to your garden and quickly will see how friendly it is!

For This Week's Garden - July 14, 2010

SIDE BAR

Native Plants that Attract Butterflies

Arrow-leaved groundsel (*Senecio triangularis*)
Black hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*)
Blue or red elderberry (*Sambucus caerulea* and *S. racemosa*)
Bush cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosa*)
Choke cherry and bitter cherry (*Prunus virginiana* and *Prunus emarginata*)
Edible or Indian thistle (*Cirsium edule*)
Elegant Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium elegans*)
Fleabane (*Erigeron compositus*)
Hardhack spirea (*Spiraea douglasii*)
Highbush cranberry (*Viburnum edule*)
Mock orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*)
Nettles (*Urtica* species)
Pacific bleeding heart (*Dicentra formosa*)
Pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*)
Spreading phlox (*Phlox diffusa*)
Redstem ceanothus (*Ceanothus sanguineus*)
Stonecrop (*Sedum* species)
Willow (*Salix* species)
Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)

Fritillary on the native plant pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*) at Hurricane Ridge.



White pine on pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*).



Many informative brochures, including one on butterfly-friendly gardens, are available at the WSU Extension Office at the Clallam County Courthouse, 223 E. Fourth St., in Port Angeles.