The Natural Gardener

Plants for Butterflies

This guide will help take you from egg to caterpillar to pupae to butterfly. Experience the inspirational life cycle of this beautiful creature in your own garden. For successful butterfly gardening, host plants must be present to feed the caterpillars and nectar plants to attract their parents. The little caterpillars may devour the host plant, but it's a worthwhile sacrifice that any genuine butterfly gardener should be willing to make. In most cases the plant will come back, or the avid butterfly steward will simply supply more of the host plant!

Host Plants:
(caterpillars)

apple (red spotted purple, spring azure, eastern tiger swallowtail, viceroy)
artemesia (painted lady)
ash (eastern tiger swallowtail)
aster (pearl crescent, dainty sulphur, gorgone checkerspot)
bean (gray hairstreak)
black cherry (hairstreak, azure, swallowtail)
black willow (swallowtail, cloak, admiral, viceroy)
broccoli (cabbage)
brussel sprouts(cabbage)
butter & eggs (common buckeye)
cabbage (cabbage)
carrot (black swallowtail)
cauliflower (cabbage)
citrus (black swallowtail, giant swallowtail)
chinkapin oak (California sister)
clover (cloudless sulphur, clouded sulphur, eastern tailed blue)
collards (cabbage)
coral bean (azure)
crucifers (checkered white, mustard white)
dill (black swallowtail)
dogwood (dainty sulphur, spring azure)
Dutchman's pipevine (pipevine swallowtail)
elms (question mark, cloak, comma, mourning cloak, painted lady, tawny emperor)

false indigo (southern dogface, gray hairstreak)
fennel (black swallowtail)
flame acanthus (crescentspot)
frogfruit (buckeye, peacock, crescentspot)
grasses (skipper, wood nymph)
goldenrod (checkerspot)
hackberry (questionmark, hackberry, mourning cloak, American snout)
hollyhock (checkered skipper, painted lady)
hop tree (giant swallowtail)
Indian paintbrush (common buckeye, checkerspot)
knotweed (swallowtail, purplish copper)
lamb's quarters (common sootywing, western pigmy blue)
lantana (painted lady)
legumes (blue hairstreak, clouded sulfur, dogface, orange sulphur)
live oak (California sister)
lupine (orange sulphur)
mallow (checkered skipper, gray hairstreak, painted lady)
maple (eastern tiger swallowtail)
marigold (dainty sulphur)
Mexican plum (swallowtail)
milkweed (monarch, queen)
mustards (cabbage)

oaks (California sister, Horace's duskywing, southern hairstreak, red spotted purple)
parsley (black swallowtail)
parsnip (black swallowtail)
passionvine (gulf fritillary, julia heliconian, variegated fritillary, zebra longwing)
pea (eastern tailed blue, gray hairstreak, sulphurs)
pipevine (*Aristolochia*) (swallowtail)
plum (red spotted purple, viceroy)
possumhaw holly (azure)
prickly ash (giant swallowtail)
ragweed (gorgone checkerspot)
rose (mourning cloak)
roughleaf dogwood (azure)
rue (black swallowtail, giant swallowtail)
ruellia (common buckeye, texas crescent)
St. Augustine grass (clouded skipper, fiery skipper, orange skipperling, sanchem skipper)
senna (cloudless sulphur)
shrimp plant (crescent spot)
snapdragon vine (common buckeye)
soybean (southern dogface)
spicebush (spicebush swallowtail)
stonecrop (common buckeye, variegated fritillary)
sumac (hairstreak)

sunflower (painted lady, gorgone checkerspot, spring azure)
sweet alyssum (checkered white)
Texas ash (swallowtail)
thistle (painted lady, red admiral, regal fritillary)
verbena (buckeye)
vetch (clouded sulphur, eastern tailed blue)
violet (variegated fritillary)
wafer ash (swallowtail)
white clover (gray hairstreak, orange sulphur, southern dogface)
yaupon holly (elfin)
yellow bells (gray hairstreak)

Nectar Plants:
(butterflies)

anacacho orchid tree
aster (queen, painted lady)
Barbara's buttons
beebalm
black-eyed Susan
black dalea (dogface)
bluebonnet
bottlebrush
buddleia (fritillary, swallowtail)
cenizo

coral vine
desert willow
Engelman daisy (crescentspot)
false indigo
fennel (swallowtail)
flame acanthus (swallowtail, fritillary)
fruit trees (swallowtail)
gaillardia (swallowtail)
gayfeather
goldenrod
hop tree (giant swallowtail)
Indian blanket
Indian paintbrush

kidneywood (crescent spot, swallowtail)
lantana (fritillary, swallowtail, queen, monarch)
lemon mint
Mexican flame vine
Mexican hat
milkweed (monarch,skipper)
mimosa, native
mistflower (monarch, skipper)
penta (swallowtail)
phlox (hairstreak)
red flowers (dogface)
roses

rotten fruit (admiral, hackberry, questionmark)
roughleaf dogwood
rusty blackhaw viburnum
salvia
sunflower (painted lady)
thistle
trumpet vine
verbena (monarch)
vitex (hairstreak)
yarrow (hairstreak)
yellow flowers (sulfur, dogface)
zinnia (swallowtail)

To help guide you, keep in mind these basic principles when arranging your chosen plants. First off, try to keep the shorter growing plants in the front or outside edges of your garden, and the taller growing plants in the back or center. Also, plant the shorter growing plants towards the south, and the taller growing plants towards the north for maximum sun exposure. Second, it's best to place the larval food plants in hidden or less noticeable areas in order to help keep the defenseless caterpillars safe from predators. Third, plant large sections of one color rather than planting single plants of varying colors in one area. Finally, plan for an extended butterfly season by choosing spring, summer and fall blooming plants.

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