

Butterflies

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Butterflies are attracted to a garden for two reasons, food in the form of flower nectar and habitat, conditions that butterflies need to reproduce and thrive. Examples of habitat conditions include puddles or moist areas that butterflies use to obtain nutrients from, sheltered sunny spots to bask in, and host plants in which butterflies can lay their eggs and feed on the nectar. Each butterfly has species-specific host plants, for example, monarch butterflies lay eggs in milkweed plants.

Shallow depressions in the soil in which rainwater collects are ideal for butterflies. Alternatively, you can create puddles that are more permanent by burying a shallow container so that it's flush with the ground, fill it with sand, and then add water to it. Butterflies are cold blooded and need to bask in the sun to keep their body temperature warm. A flat open lawn area or groups of flat stones are two easy ways to provide sunny spots for basking butterflies.

Each butterfly has its own preference for flower nectar. Native flowering perennials, trees, and shrubs that bloom throughout the growing season such as purple coneflower, goldenrod, butterfly weed, black-eyed Susan, and the redbud tree are excellent choices for butterfly gardens. Flowering plants should be planted in small groups of 3 to 5 plants, or in a mass. A large grouping of wild bergamot for instance is better than planting a single species because a greater number of butterflies will flock to them. Also by adding some annuals to this mix will add to the diversity of flowers.

Butterflies also have different needs for the caterpillar stage. Typically butterflies like to lay their eggs on different types of plants for the caterpillars to feed on than what the adults feeding on the nectar of flowers. I recommend adding some of these plants to the area to add variety and to help assure you will have butterflies and maybe the particular type of butterfly. Some plants to include for the caterpillars include snapdragon, violet, milkweed, daisy, dill and parsley, lilac, and apple. Be careful of certain plants which can be invasive and try to take over the flower bed.

When planting a flower garden to attract butterflies you end up with a variety of other insects. Certainly, there are flowers preferred by butterflies and flowers preferred by bees. However, different species of butterflies prefer specific plants for the caterpillar stage and specific flowers for the adult stage. Remembering to add early blooming and late blooming flowers as the flight pattern of butterflies is from early spring to late fall. However you can also look at your neighbors and see what they have planted which will complement your garden.

There are many different kinds of butterflies, which can be found in Wyoming. Some of the ones to look for are the Admiral (*Limenitis lorquini*) family which include the Viceroy, the Longwings (*Heliconiinae*) which include the many Fritillary butterflies, the Milkweed butterflies

include the very popular Monarch, the True Brushfoots (Nymphalinae) include the American Lady, Painted lady, or the many spectacular Swallowtails, if there are specific types of butterflies you are interested in attracting read up on the specific plants needed for that species.

In a Butterfly garden the use of pesticides should be limited, so as you do not affect the larval stage or the adult stage of butterflies. You will notice some plant damage from the feeding of the caterpillars, so do not get overly concerned with that activity. Any unwanted insects can be dealt with on an individual bases just as the weeds can be.

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