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BUTTERFLY GARDENING IN THE SACRAMENTO VALLEY

In order to create a beautiful, colorful garden for attracting butterflies, keep a few principles in mind. Most butterflies require a larger area of host plants, pupation sites, adult food supply, and territory than an ordinary residential lot can provide. The goal should be to select plants that will intercept randomly moving “excess” butterflies and detain them where they can be observed and enjoyed.

In the Sacramento area butterflies are most numerous from August through late October. Most California natives bloom in spring long before most of our butterflies arrive. Skillful planting with these principles in mind will enable you to maximize both the number of individuals and the number of species you will see in your garden.

Many “weeds” (thistles, vetch, cheeseweed, milkweed, dandelion, plantain, dock, and others) are excellent nectar sources or host plants for larvae. This is a good reason to not keep the garden too tidy.

Plants that attract adults:

SHRUBS:

Rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*) - Short lived in heavy clay soils, flower foul odor

Coyotebrush (*Baccharis pilularis* and *ssp. consanguinea*) - Male plants attract better.

Butterfly-Bush (*Buddleia*, especially *B. davidii*) - Only pink and purple varieties

Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) - Pink and purple varieties

Lavender (*Lavandula*)

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

Lantana - Orange and purple attract the most.

Pride-of-Madera (*Echium candicans*)

Waxleaf and other Privets (*Ligustrum*)

Escallonia (*E. rubra* and *E. exoniensis*)

PERENNIALS:

Asters (*Asteraceae*) and *Boltonia asteroides* are the best butterfly flowers.

Not Chinese aster (*Cassiope*) or most Fleabanes (*Erigeron*)

Goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*) almost as good as Asters

Gum Plant (*Grindelia* especially *G. camporum* and *G. paludosa*)

Salt Marsh Fleabane (*Pluchea odorata*)

Perennial sunflower (*Helianthus spp.*)

Wild Buckwheats (*Eriogonum spp.*)

Milkweed (*Asclepias spp.*)

Coyotemint or Western Pennyroyal (*Monardella spp.*) - Short lived on heavier soils

Giant Hyssop (*Agastache nepetoides*)

Mints (*Mentha spp.*) - Can be invasive

Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*)

Onions (*Allium*)

Gayfeather (*Liatris*)

Joe-Pye Weed (*Eupatorium spp*)- Needs lot of water, can get very tall.
Verbena - Especially blue and purple ones
Gazanias

ANNUALS:

Marigolds (*Tagetes, Bidens*) not Calendula (Pot Marigold)
Zinnia - Very good attractors
Pincushion Flower (*Scabiosa spp*)

Final thoughts:

If you want butterflies, don't use insecticides in the garden. This includes BT (*Bacillus thuringiensis*).

Don't provide breeding habitat for disease-carrying mosquitoes.

Don't prune out all your Mistletoe; it is the only host plant for the Great Purple Hairstreaks butterfly (*Atlides halesus*)

This information by Treva Valentine, Master Gardener, is a partial summary of
Dr. Arthur Shapiro's excellent document found on his butterfly website
<http://butterfly.ucdavis.edu>

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