



UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA

# Agriculture & Natural Resources

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION • YOLO COUNTY

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## BACKYARD HABITATS: ATTRACTING BUTTERFLIES

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By Judy Cecil

Create a colorful haven for butterflies by planting and maintaining the kinds of flowers, shrubs, and trees that these insects find irresistible. This guide will help you select plants for different stages in the butterfly's life cycle, from food plants for caterpillars to nectar-producing plants for adults.

The butterfly begins life as an egg, which is laid on or near a host plant. When the egg hatches, a caterpillar emerges to feed on the leaves of the host plant specific to its type. After several weeks of growth, the caterpillar molts into a chrysalis. Within one to three weeks, the adult, winged butterfly appears. Butterflies require a variety of sweetly scented, colorful, nectar-producing flowers to feed upon. (A word of caution: many popular cultivars have lost their aroma during horticultural development, so check this feature carefully when choosing plants).

The ideal butterfly garden will include plants for both the larval and adult stages of the butterfly's life cycle, from spring through fall. In Yolo County, butterflies are most numerous from August through late October. Commonly sighted species include Swallowtails, Whites, Monarchs, and Skippers.

Start your butterfly garden in a sunny spot protected from wind. Butterflies will use areas covered with low ground covers, grasses, or clovers, to sun themselves. Since they are cold-blooded, sunning helps regulate their temperatures. A flat rock along the edge of the garden will also serve this purpose. Most butterflies obtain water from the plants they visit, but a birdbath or other shallow dish filled with flat stones will also provide a safe drinking spot. The stones should emerge from the water, allowing the butterflies to alight and drink without getting wet.

Avoid the use of chemical pesticides in your butterfly garden. Most of these materials are non-selective; that is, they destroy not only insect pests but also desirable species, such as butterflies.

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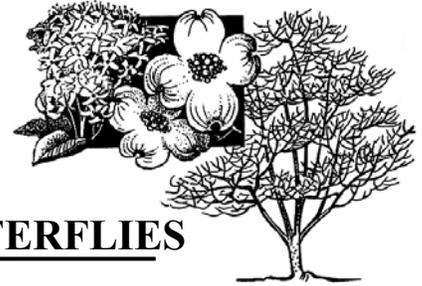
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## PLANTS ATTRACTIVE TO BUTTERFLIES

### Food Plants for Butterfly Larvae:

#### Annuals, perennials, grasses, ground covers, vines

Alcea rosea (Hollyhocks)  
 Antirrhinum majus\* (Snapdragon)  
 Artichoke  
 Asclepius\* (Milkweed)  
 Aster\*  
 Broccoli, Cabbage, Mustard  
 Diascia (Twin Spur)  
 Dicentra (Bleeding Heart)  
 Digitalis Purpurea (Foxglove)  
 Foeniculum vulgare (Fennel)  
 Geum  
 Heliathus  
 Heliotropium arborescens  
 Lupinus (Lupine)  
 Passiflora (Passion Vine)  
 Penstemon  
 Strawberry  
 Tropaeolum majus (Nasturtium)  
 Veronica (Speedwell)  
 Wisteria



#### Trees and Shrubs

Aesculus\* (Horsechestnut)  
 Arbutus menziesii\* (Madrone)  
 Betula (Birch)  
 Cassia (Senna)  
 Ceanothus\* (Wild lilac)  
 Celtis (Hackberry)  
 Citrus\*  
 Cornus (Dogwood)  
 Crataegus (Hawthorne)  
 Hibiscus  
 Lavatera (Tree Mallow)  
 Malus (Crabtree)  
 Malva (Mallow)  
 Pinus (Pine)  
 Platanus (Plane Tree, Sycamore)  
 Plumbago auriculata  
 Quercus (Oak)  
 Rhamnus californica\* (Coffeeberry)  
 Ribes\* (Currant, Gooseberry)  
 Rosa (Rose)  
 Salix (Willow)  
 Spiraea\*  
 Viburnum




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\* these plants also produce nectar-bearing flowers attractive to butterflies