

## BUTTERFLY GARDENING WITH WILD FLOWERS

We all love to watch butterflies flitting by, but generally, we are less enthused by their babies. Caterpillars tend to have voracious appetites which tend to aggravate gardeners who don't appreciate holes in the leaves of prize plants. A way to get around this conundrum is to plant specific wildflowers in one section of the flower garden to attract adult butterflies to lay their eggs there, rather than on the expensive imported cultivars. This is not to say that wild host plants aren't lovely in their own right.



A favorite butterfly is the Monarch, which loves to sip nectar from milkweed flowers and also to lay its eggs on the leaves. Common Milkweed is a wonderful host not only for the monarch, but also for at least 41 other wildlife species. However, this plant has the unfortunate habit of spreading like crazy. A good alternate choice is the rose-pink Swamp Milkweed, which attracts at least 20 species of wildlife. 'Ice Ballet' is a lovely white cultivar.

Bush Clover (*Lespedeza capitata*) is favored by both the larvae (caterpillars) and the adult Eastern Tailed Blue butterfly. Bush Clover is 2'-5' tall and unbranched with smallish white flowers. It is a good background plant which fixes nitrogen in the soil.

The larvae of the Great Spangled Fritillary (and other species of fritillaries) love Violets. The adult butterflies will sip nectar from a wide variety of wild flowers. You might want to consider leaving a patch of violets somewhere as a groundcover.

The Pearly Crescentspot larvae love to nibble on New England Asters, as well as on other asters. The species form, the purple-flowered New England Aster, is a lovely 3' tall plant. A pink-flowering cultivar is 'Alma Potschke'. If most New England Asters prove to be too large, the cultivar 'Purple Dome' is shorter and equal, if not superior, in flower power. After the larvae are done feeding and have metamorphosed into butterflies, the adults will happily sip nectar from the flowers of asters and also milkweeds.

Sunflowers are the plants of choice for the Silvery Checkerspot. Not only do these butterflies and their larvae love the annual sunflowers, but they also live on the perennial varieties of Helianthus. A nice cultivar is 'Lemon Yellow' (*Helianthus maximilliana*). The species *Helianthus maximilliana* is lovely, but very tall (6'), so it is appropriate for the back of the border.

Other native flowers that are favored by butterflies:

*Echinacea*—various species and cultivars  
*Erigeron*-----various species and cultivars  
*Eupatorium*---various species and cultivars  
*Euthamia graminifolia*—Lance-leaved goldenrod  
*Liatris*-----various species and cultivars  
*Monarda*-----various species and cultivars  
*Solidago*-----various species and cultivars (non allergenic)

Happy Gardening,  
Jennifer Porwit

(Just a note: many butterfly hosts are actually trees-- hackberry, oaks, wild cherries and plums, aspens, elms, willows, ashes, and birches.)

Landscaping for Wildlife by Carrol L. Henderson

Gardening for Wildlife by Craig Tufts and Peter Loewer

Landscaping with Native Plants of Minnesota by Lynn M. Steiner