

Great Garden Flowers for Butterflies



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GREAT GARDEN FLOWERS FOR BUTTERFLIES

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Written by G. Edwin Varner.

Preface

This ebook is about growing beautiful garden flowers to attract adult butterflies. Allow your garden to become a popular location for many butterflies to visit during the summer and fall.

Please be aware that the intent of this publication is not for butterfly identification or documenting which host plants specific caterpillars eat.

The information on each plant may contain inaccuracies about their growing conditions and hardiness. Each plant has its USDA hardiness zones, best growth conditions, and recommended varieties to find and grow. Please be aware these plants may not be available, discontinued, or replaced for better varieties by nurseries.

The following plants use their Latin name first, then by a common name or names.

The digital photos are of the flowers at my home, garden centers, public gardens, and Creative Commons (CC0) licensed images.

Many of the CC0 photos (including a few of my own) show the flower along with a representative butterfly. It is purely coincidental that several are Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) and the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) butterflies. Other photos are of the Painted Lady butterfly (*Vanessa cardui*) and a few others.

Introduction



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*)

“The butterfly is a flying flower, The flower a tethered butterfly.”

— French poet Ponce Denis Écouchard Lebrun (1729 -1807)

Monsieur Lebrun single-handedly defined the relationship between flowers and butterflies with his above observation. Who can judge which are more beautiful — the wings of the butterfly or the flower’s petals?

Do you wish to raise several long-blooming, colorful garden flowers that attract many lovely butterflies? If so, with guidance from this informative ebook, you will learn which plants to grow.

The flowering plants described in the following pages are easy to raise and fast-blooming to achieve maximum butterfly activity in your garden. We can classify several of these flowers as being butterfly-magnets. They seem to attract these insects far and wide throughout the summer and into the fall.

These flowers have brilliant colors and scents to enhance our enjoyment and produce plenty of sweet nectar for hungry adult butterflies. They need only nectar to fuel their primary goal in finding a mate to establish the next generation. Allow your garden to become a popular eating and dating location for many butterflies to visit.

After living most of their lives as caterpillars, butterflies miraculously metamorphosize into ephemeral winged adults. What was once earth-anchored can now float and flutter free to vistas of floral color and sweetness. Both you and they can enjoy a peaceful, unique experience in your vibrant and nectar-filled flower garden.

Portions of the following text may include information copied from my earlier ebooks. Here, I have included additional plants and updated earlier informational material.

To find plants or seeds of the following species and varieties, please visit your nearby larger garden centers or search online to find specialty nurseries that grow and sell them.

Achillea – Yarrow

Achillea filipendulina



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.” — Maya Angelou

Famous for cottage and wild gardens, this hardy perennial (zones 3 to 9) works best in an informal flower bed, such as one devoted to wildflowers. Once planted, you will not have to care for it but spend more time admiring the colorful flower clusters and the equally colorful butterflies that visit them.

Considered a weed, wild-growing Yarrow thrives in disturbed areas. Through hybridization with other related species, growers have created very colorful varieties with a less aggressive weedy growth habit. They top their long stems with several white, light to dark pink, red, or bright yellow “flattened” flower clusters (called corymbs). The dark-green to silvery-white, serrated leaves (depending on the variety) are attractive and pungently herbal scented. These types have proven to be great for growing in perennial flower beds.

As a member of the Aster family, these plants can grow to three feet tall or more, depending on soil fertility. Newer hybrids grow less lofty and are bushy. Most varieties bloom all summer when planted in full sun and well-drained soil.

Agastache – Hyssop

Agastache aurantiaca



“No garden truly blooms until butterflies have danced upon it.” — K. D’Angelo

Throughout this ebook, we can classify several garden flowers as being butterfly-magnets. They seem to draw in these insects far and wide. Maybe it is their petal colors or floral scents that attract them. These beautiful semi-woody perennials are an outstanding example of this lepidopteran enticement.

Originating from the desert environment of southwestern North America, these plants are popular each year because of their tremendous flower production, long-blooming, and exciting colors.

They also attract butterflies and, as an extra incentive to grow them, hummingbirds by the million. Well, not precisely, but close!

Agastache flowers resembling those of Salvia with long, drawn-out petals. The exhilarating licorice or peppermint fragrance is from the leaves and stems.

There are several recommended varieties ready to grow in your garden. Many have breathtaking colorful blends of pink, rose, pale orange, and peach. When the sun shines through the petals, they glow like hot embers. All those colors can be mesmerizing.

Most varieties bloom from midsummer to fall and are hardy from zones 6 to 10. The ever-blooming bushy types can grow over three feet tall. Plant them in plenty of sunshine and well-drained soil. Since they are of a desert heritage, they tolerate drier soil longer than most other perennials.

Asclepias – Milkweed

Asclepias curassavica; Asclepias incarnata



Monarch butterfly caterpillar (*Danaus plexippus*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Butterflies are nature’s angels. They remind us what a gift it is to be alive.” — Robyn Nola

There are many species of these plants scattered around North and South America, with a sprinkling of some in Africa. Most or all types exude a toxic white sap when injured. Some insects, including the caterpillar form of the Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), absorb the poisonous compounds as protection against predation. Other insects, such as bees and adult butterflies, relish drinking the nectar.

We can't go wrong by adding the ultra-colorful *Asclepias curassavica* to our flower beds. A common name for this plant is "Mexican Bloodflower." Not all members of the Milkweed family are hardy perennials; some are tropical and grow as annuals. This colorful, frost-tender plant is more of a tropical species but is raised anywhere.

Sow seeds eight weeks before the last spring frost date and grow in full or partial sunlight and well-drained, fertile soil. Look for the varieties called **Silky Gold** or **Silky Red** (or color name variations starting with Silky) in garden centers. Mature plants can grow to over three feet tall and wide.

If you live in North America, this plant attracts Monarch butterflies. It is a food resource for the larval stages of its life-cycle, which may pose a potential problem. Should we plant these species in the southern part of the United States? Hey, why not? If it provides food for the butterfly's young, would that be ideal for helping the butterfly survive? Yes, but also a no.

In the southern states, these plants grow longer into the late fall. The butterflies lay their eggs on the plants in hopes of a new generation developing. But the butterflies need to travel into the central part of Mexico for wintering-over until spring. If many butterflies do not complete the rest of this journey, they will succumb to winter cold—even in the southern parts of the USA. Keep this in mind if you live in the southern states and wish to grow these flowers.

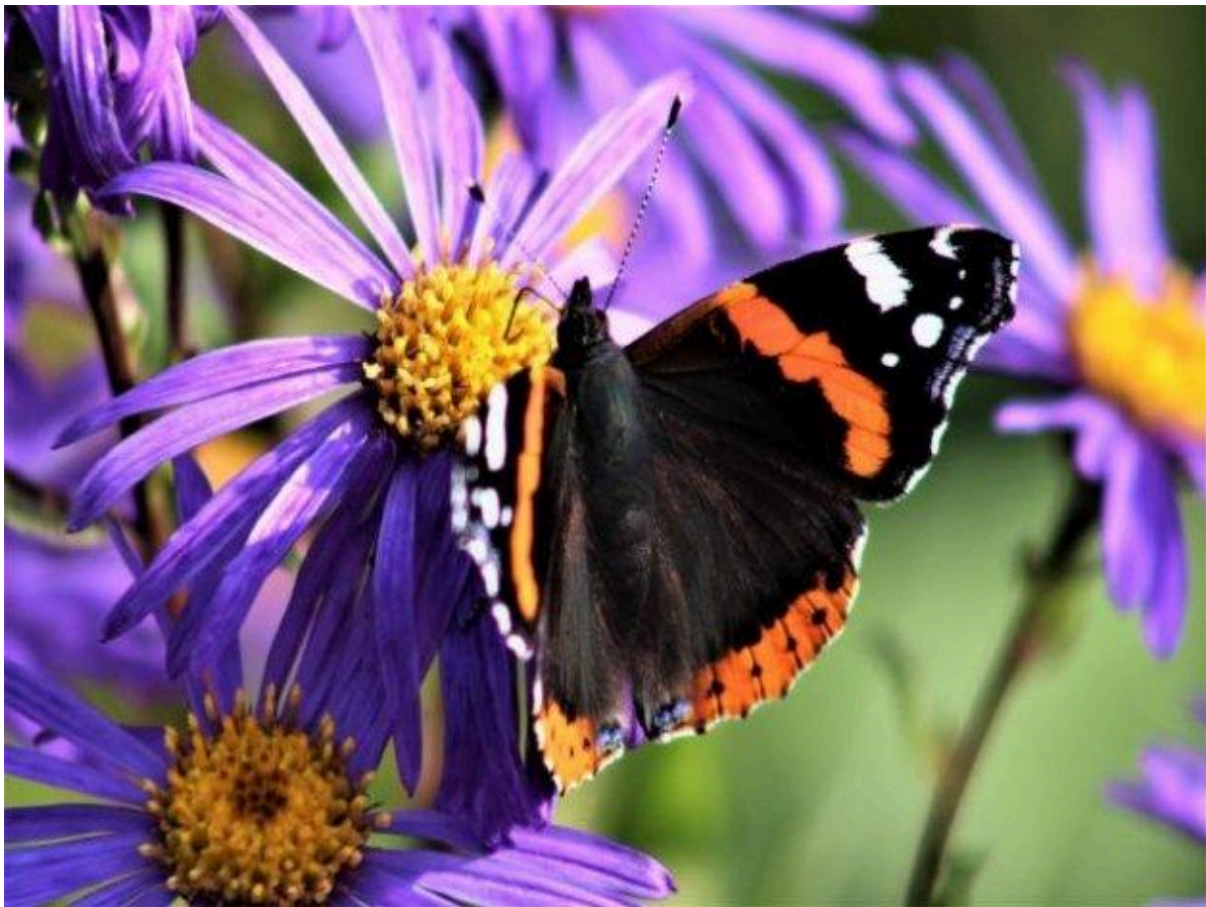
For a wildflower species, grow the **Swamp Milkweed** (*Asclepias incarnata*). This milkweed is also native to North America. Unlike the Common Milkweed, this species prefers to live in wet or semi-swampy locations, including roadside ditches.

The cluster of flowers is an attractive pinkish-rose, and they bloom throughout the summer. A common add-on name is 'incarnata,' meaning pale pink, as in flesh tones. This species is the parent to smaller growing cultivars or varieties better suited to growing in flower gardens.

You can grow most Milkweed species from seed, though many need a cold stratification period to stimulate germination. I rarely find plants in garden centers which I find perplexing. Most are hardy perennials and excellent representatives for attracting pollinators.

Aster – New England Aster

Aster novae-angliae; Symphyotrichum novae-angliae



Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Metamorphosis has always been the greatest symbol of change for poets and artists. Imagine that you could be a caterpillar one moment and a butterfly the next.” — Louie Schwartzberg

Older reference books list this plant as *Aster novae-angliae* (which I grew up with). Botanists now classify it as *Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*. Whoa! That’s a sloppy mouthful of Latin! They can’t leave the names alone for us regular folk. Oh well, between you and me, let’s keep it listed as Aster. I won’t tell if you don’t.

Most, if not all, of our garden flowers, originated as wildflowers from somewhere in the world. They became accepted into our gardens because of their beauty, usually as smaller-sized individuals or genetically selected stock.

Once these plants became tame from their wildly growing lifestyles, they were further chosen for better qualities. Some of these qualities are disease resistance, improved flower colors, and increased hardiness and vigor.

Asters are one such group of plants that botanists and growers manipulated to fit comfortably in our gardens. Modern varieties usually display as mounded, shorter plants covered with flowers — just like their *Chrysanthemum* relations — in the fall. But those tall-growing wild-bunch can thrive and be enjoyed for their outstanding garden beauty. If you can find a sunny, well-drained, fertile spot in your garden, these taller plants will dazzle you with color, not only of their petals but also with flapping butterfly wings.

One such behemoth of beauty is the **New England Aster**. These stately plants, native to North America, display their bright purple flower clusters with yellow centers across the rural landscapes and wild gardens in late summer or early fall. A plant can grow over six feet and flaunt its stunning purple blossoms for about two months.

Since it blooms in Autumn, the flowers provide an important nectar source for many pollinator insects, especially adult butterflies, including Mexico-bound migrating Monarch butterflies in the United States.

This plant can act as a weed for it self-seeds a-plenty in favorable growing conditions such as fertile, moist soil and sunny locations. It can tolerate drier soil, partial shade, and less than ideal productive habitat, such as a road bank, but may not grow as tall.

These stunning plants are hardy from zones 3 to 7 but suffer in warmer zonal locations.

Buddleia – Butterfly Bush

Buddleia davidii



Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

***“And when all the wars are over, a butterfly will still be beautiful.” —
Ruskin Bond***

Well, with the common name of this plant, what more do we need to know?

We all love the flowers that make butterflies happy. For years, gardeners observed our large-winged insects gravitate to the colorful and highly fragrant flower spikes. They will feverishly flutter about, inserting their coiled proboscis into the tiny florets.

Are some butterflies attracted to specific colors of *Buddleia*? Scientists have discovered it depends upon their species — some prefer white, others pink, while others like blue. I tried to follow up on this research but could not determine which butterfly species likes which flower color. Oh well, let's go wild and plant several colorful *Buddleia* varieties to attract all those butterflies.

Arranged in an elongated spike, the massive cluster of tiny florets bloom by midsummer and into fall. These flower spikes release a strong fragrance of a blend of citrus, honey, and pine. You may smell something else.

Hardy from zones 5 to 10 grow these beautiful woody shrubs in full sun and rich soil. They appear to have no insect or disease problems, but their only concern is severe cold temperatures. The top growth will die back to the ground in northern climates after each winter but quickly re-grow from underground shoots in early summer. Like most woody perennials, avoid over-fertilization of the soil. A lean, low nitrogen growing medium helps the stems become "woodier" to ensure better winter cold survival.

You can find many colorful and potted varieties in larger garden centers and nurseries. Don't bother growing these shrubs from seed — it takes too long to develop into a blooming-sized age.

Depending on where you live, your soil fertility, and variety (or species), some varieties can grow up to ten feet tall and slightly less wide. If you live in colder climates, most types will average less. However, they still command the admiration of their abundance of bloom and power to attract the neighborhood butterflies.

Calendula – Pot Marigold

Calendula officinalis



Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Butterflies are self-propelled flowers.” — R.H. Heinlein

Marigold’s common name is confusing since gardeners also call another but an unrelated flower, a Marigold (technically called *Tagetes*), described later.

Calendula has many varieties, with flower colors ranging from bright yellows and vibrant oranges to mixed shades. Many bold-colored, double-petaled varieties are available as seeds, which are outstanding to view in a garden, but butterflies prefer the single-petaled types.

Here, they have better access to land on the outstretched outer ray-petals and sip the plentiful nectar within the inner disc-flowers.

Their brightly colored petals are edible (caution: may be allergic to some people), adding vivid color to salads, rice dishes, soups, and stews. This culinary usage explains the common nickname of Pot Marigold. Craft folks also use them as a dye to add coloring to fabrics and as an application to skin lotions.

The flowers bloom in midsummer until a killing frost. They will self-seed, and new plants will grow and flourish next year. They are low maintenance, but the occasional clipping of old flowers helps prevent excessive seed production. This will prompt more flowers to bloom during the summer. They will need plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil to grow well.

You can easily find unique colors and varieties in almost all seed catalogs and garden centers.

Callistephus – China Aster

Callistephus chinensis



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

***“Everyone is like a butterfly; they start out ugly and awkward and then morph into beautiful, graceful butterflies that everyone loves.”
— Drew Barrymore***

What looks like an aster, chrysanthemum, and peony all at the same time? You don't have to look any further than this delightful daisy-like annual. New varieties can temporarily confuse even experienced gardeners with what type of plant it is with their fluffy or billowy blossoms.

Native to China, North and South Korea, this colorful plant has delighted gardeners worldwide. Many people think of it as being an essential cottage garden inhabitant. The flowers can display single to double petals in a wide range of vivid colors, highlighted with a central disk of bright yellow disk florets. Like many of the flowers described in this ebook, butterflies prefer the single-petalled types. The hybrid varieties will display flowers up to five inches in diameter.

Like most other annuals, these plants can germinate and grow quickly in warm, moist soil. They will bloom for most of the summer if prevented from forming seeds. All of this depends on you providing the best growing conditions, preferring to spend their days in as much sunshine and fertile, moist (but not constantly wet), well-drained soil.

Older varieties had a troubling habit of developing viral and fungal diseases when crowded together or grown in humid, partly shady areas. Newer types may occasionally experience this problem, but not as severe.

Centaurea – Bachelor’s Buttons; Cornflower

Centaurea cyanus



Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Just living is not enough,” said the butterfly, “one must have sunshine, freedom and a little flower.” — Hans Christian Anderson

Gardeners have always considered this annual cottage garden plant a favorite for its intensely colorful flowers. Each plant will produce extensive summer displays.

Once considered an agricultural weed, it eventually became a cherished garden flower, making it effortless to grow in any garden. This flower

reminds me of the old Hans Christian Andersen tale of the ugly duckling turning into a beautiful swan. No one liked this flower, but over time, people eventually accepted it because it produced many flowers over the summer.

The seeds are easy to sow — just scatter and lightly cover with the soil. The plants will thrive in well-drained, fertile soil and in as much sunlight as possible.

Cornflowers can have single to double petals, and the colors range from intense blue to purple, pink, red, and brilliant white. The flowers are terrific for picking, especially since that fantastic blue color is so damn attractive. Hey, you can't have enough blue flowers in any garden! No matter what color, plenty of butterflies will visit these flowers.

The flowers were once a fashion accessory for men, associated with the insertion of a flower or a small bouquet into the buttonholes of men's jackets or coats, and became known as **Bachelor's Buttons**. That was a fashion statement from years ago and now considered "nerdy" or "effeminate" by today's standards. Wearing worn or torn jeans with faded sweatshirts while constantly clutching a smartphone is today's fashion ensemble. We live in sad times.

Seeds of this annual are in almost all seed catalogs and garden centers. Some nurseries will even offer potted plants, but you get more bang for your buck (and attract more butterflies) by sowing many seeds in your garden.

Cephalanthus – Buttonbush

Cephalanthus occidentalis



“Beautiful and graceful, varied and enchanting, small but approachable, butterflies lead you to the sunny side of life. And everyone deserves a little sunshine.” — Jeffrey Glassberg

This mouthful name comes from the Greek words *cephalo*, meaning head, and *anthos* meaning flower. The other common names for this shrub are Honeybells, Honeyball, and Buttonwillow. I would volunteer another common name of “butterfly-ball,” for it is not uncommon to find one fluttering on the flower heads.

Buttonbush is a deciduous shrub, typically growing to under eight feet tall but may grow much taller. You can prune it to control height and

spread.

Common throughout the eastern parts of the United States, we usually find it growing in sunny, wet, or moist thickets, swamps, roadside ditches, and edges of ponds. I know—you think this is not the ideal condition for your garden. You are correct, but all you have to do is water this shrub more often. Yes, give it lots of water in the summer.

It produces spherical, pincushion-like, or head-like flower clusters composed of hundreds of tiny, tubular florets looking like pins by midsummer until early fall.

These flower spheres have a sweet, honey-like fragrance that attracts plenty of butterflies, bees, and curiously placed noses. If you wish to add a curiosity plant to your garden, this should pleasantly suffice.

A recommended variety to grow is **Sugar Shack**, and you may find it in many larger garden centers. Try to find and grow this delightful shrub.

Coreopsis – Tickseed

Coreopsis tinctoria; Coreopsis lanceolata



***“Among the varied species of insects, butterflies are the most poetic.”
– Ana Gerhard***

These attractive annual and perennial plants are lovely to include in any flower garden. The perennial varieties are easy to grow, and once established in your garden, become a no-fuss, problem-free attraction.

Being a vibrant-colored member of the daisy family, it gets its unusual nickname of tickseed because of having its seeds resembling blood-engorged ticks. Oh, that’s sick! The things people imagine are borderline disturbing. What is not distressing is the variety of

butterflies and bees attracted to the brilliantly colorful, nectar-filled flowers.

By some accounts, there are over 80 species of *Coreopsis*. About half are native to the prairie areas of the entire central length of North America. The other half are native to regions in Central and South America. With these species, breeders have been very busy creating colorful hybrids.

Varieties now found in garden centers have stunning red, pink, orange, and vibrant yellow petals with additional bi-colors, bizarre stripes, and splotches — all on plants ranging in different heights. Heavens to Betsy, how can anyone decide what to plant in a garden?

An old but still popular annual species is the *Coreopsis tinctoria* or the **Plains Coreopsis**. Tall growing to over three feet, it sports many eye-catching bright yellow daisies with brownish-red centers. You will always find new plants sprouting each spring from their self-sown seeds.

For a perennial species/variety having pure yellow double flowers, you can't go wrong planting *Coreopsis lanceolata* '**Early Sunrise**'. It grows shorter and bushier, is easy to grow, and makes excellent cut flowers from your garden. It, and other similar varieties, is hardy from zones 4 to 9.

Coreopsis will bloom all summer if planted in full sunlight and fertile, well-drained soil. They dislike clay-based soils and prefer a more sandy or gravelly medium.

For your garden plants, always deadhead spent flowers to prevent excessive seed formation, which can “shut down” further flower production for the season.

You can purchase potted plants of these various hybrids in garden centers and seeds (including several species) in wildflower catalogs.

Cosmos

Cosmos bipinnatus; Cosmos sulphureus



Great Spangled Fritillary (*Speyeria cybele*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Not quite birds, as they were not quite flowers, mysterious and fascinating as are all indeterminate creatures.” — Elizabeth Goudge

Oh my goodness, I must caution you, for there must be a zillion hybrid varieties in this colorful group of annuals. Their descriptions will overwhelm you if you read the seed catalogs (either in print or online) and try to decide which ones to grow in your garden.

As a relative in the immense daisy family, botanists say Cosmos is “ridiculously easy” to grow in any garden and reward you with a windfall of stunning ever-blooming flowers.

The blossoms usually have long stems — perfect for all summer admiration of butterflies riding the swaying flower heads in the warm breeze.

Most plants can grow to over three feet tall and quickly fill in an area over the summer.

To add bonus points, these plants can easily tolerate general neglect, such as less watering and thriving in less fertile ground. If you pamper them with kindness — watch out — they will bloom themselves silly. As long as they grow in primarily sunny areas, they will bloom all summer and into the fall.

You can expect a wide range of colors (except blue) from pure yellow to white, pink, red, orange, and many bicolors with contrasting or alternating striped petals. Most types display single petals, but semi to fully double varieties are now being bred. To instantly attract the neighborhood butterflies, grow the impressive single-petaled varieties.

Your local garden center will have packets of seeds available for you to purchase. For more colorful varieties, purchase from online seed nurseries.

Echinacea – Coneflower

Echinacea pallida; *purpurea*



Western Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio zelicaon*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Butterflies can’t see their wings. They can’t see how truly beautiful they are, but everyone else can. People are like that as well.” — Author Unknown

Echinacea derives its name from the Greek “*echinos*,” meaning “hedgehog” for its spiky center cone. Be careful when smelling the sweet fragrance, for those bristles are prickly to the nose. Ouch!! Although the colorful petals steal the floral show, these bristly cones can have a lovely iridescence in the sunlight.

Mentioned earlier in this ebook is the term “butterfly-magnet,” and Coneflowers perfectly define its obscure meaning. There is something about these flowers that always attracts butterflies. These winged-wonders will constantly flutter about these prickly blossoms throughout the summer and well into the fall.

Coneflowers thrive in the scorching sun and dry soil. Their enormous flowers bloom in late June and continue all summer. They will look rather untidy, so clip off spent flowers. They can grow to over two or three feet tall and are hardy from zones 3 to 10.

The colorful varieties offered today are nothing like the ones grown in your great-grandmother’s garden. Years ago, it was under-appreciated, but that has all changed. Hybridizers or plant breeders discovered its exciting possibilities and made an excellent plant colorfully better. But here lies a problem if you wish to maximize attracting the neighborhood butterflies. Newer varieties, although looking fabulous, appeal less to the butterflies.

One theory expressed is that excessive hybridization may limit or prevent nectar production compared to the original country wildflower types grown years ago. One interesting study (alas, I cannot locate it now but remember it) compared newer hybrids with the species type and discovered the butterflies gravitated to and remained on the species’ *Echinacea* flowers.

Our eyes always zero in on the brilliantly colorful varieties instead. If you plan to maximize having butterflies in your garden, grow the wildflower species more so than current hybrid varieties. Garden centers may not sell them, for there is more sales appeal with the dazzling types. You can find the wildflower seeds in specialty catalogs.

Eutrochium – Joe Pye Weed

Eutrochium maculatum; purpureum



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Love is like a butterfly; it goes where it pleases and it pleases wherever it goes. Love is like a butterfly, hold it too tight, it’ll crush. Hold it too loose, it’ll fly.” — Author Unknown

For those willing to raise tall-growing plants in your garden, this hardy zone 4 perennial is ideal. The local butterflies also consider these flowers ideal.

Native from central to eastern North America, it can grow up to and exceed eight feet tall. Blooming from mid to late summer, we can find

this plant growing in moist ground — either in depressed meadows, the edge of forests, and roadside ditches.

We should grow this plant in any garden to impress all eyes (and noses) with their tall, sturdy stems, impressively whorled leaves, and breathtaking, vanilla-scented dome-shaped, pale-pink to rose-pink flower heads. Long descriptive words (and that equally long sentence) can't convey the magnificence of this plant!

Don't let the size of this plant intimidate you into not adding it to your garden. If you can allow enough space, it will reward you with the impressive result of gorgeous flowers.

I have seen impressive stands of "Joeys" flanking a few country roads. I was fortunate that county road maintenance crews did not mow them down before viewing them.

How did the Joe-Pye name originate, you may be thinking? Rumor has it an old native Indian medicine man, known by colonial New England settlers as Joe Pye, used extracts of this plant to help cure several diseases, particularly typhoid fever. The Indian word for typhoid was "jopi," and because of errors of pronunciation (and spelling) became "joe-pie" or "joe-pye." Anyway, people named this fantastic plant in his honor. Now you know.

Filipendula – Meadowsweet or Queen of The Meadow

Filipendula ulmaria



CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Butterflies are not called butterflies overnight. They have to undergo tons of changes in order to acquire that name.” – Michael Bassey Johnson

This magnificent prairie wildflower can grow to over five feet tall. It produces fern-like deep green leaves with fluffy or foamy creamy white to pink flower spikes. Each flower is tiny, but each spike contains hundreds of them. They release a sweet, musk, or earthy scent that changes from light to powerful depending on the time of day or the

weather. I guess you will need to camp outside in your garden for a few days to determine when that happens.

This perennial was a vital cottage garden plant many years ago before gardeners became terrified of tall-growing plants and retreated to growing only dwarf bedding flowers. It makes an excellent background plant for your garden, conveying lightness, and airiness especially when you inhale the sweet but subdued perfume.

The flowers' scent will attract plenty of butterflies to rest and dine on those fluffy spikes, as expected.

Grow Meadowsweet in part shade and fertile soil. It is hardy from zones 3 to 9.

You may have trouble finding it in garden centers, but online wildflower specialty nurseries should have plants available.

Helianthus – Sunflower

Helianthus annuus; Helianthus maximiliani



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Morguefile.com

“The butterfly said to the sun, they can’t stop talking about my transformation. I can only do it once in my lifetime. If only they knew they could do it at any time and in countless ways.” — Dodinsky

Over the past few years, there has been a tremendous increase in breeding work on transforming our old farm-yard, drooping, large seed-headed daisy. This single-headed flower continues to be popular, but a new ensemble of multi-headed, multi-colorful varieties is now available. Not only do these plants produce many flower stems, but the

daisy-like flowers have gorgeous “hot and fiery” colors not considered likely decades ago.

This may sound grand to us gardeners, but lately, I feel sorry for the bees and butterflies. Over the years of being a nurseryman and gardener, when plants are “upgraded” to accent some specific trait, something else has to be “downgraded.” One example is fragrant flowers becoming less scented when becoming genetically enhanced with other features.

I see fewer bees and butterflies buzzing and fluttering about the new varieties of multi-stemmed sunflowers available to gardeners each year. Why do breeders develop these plants? One reason is for limited-space gardeners to grow them.

Another reason is in advances in genetics with the development of new pollen-less varieties. Breeders develop these varieties to tap into the cut-flower market. The common bright yellow sunflowers drop considerable amounts of pollen onto shiny, Pledge® - covered tables. Sort of messy, but these new pollen-less types prevent constant clean-up. Without pollen, is there also a reciprocal lack of floral nectar to attract our pollinators?

Let’s admire those older large-headed sunflowers and let the large swallowtail butterflies with their coiled mouth-straws probe inside the many florets. Let the honeybees and bumblebees become dusted with pollen while sipping for nectar.

If you wish to view lots of butterfly activity, you can also grow the taller native perennial sunflowers such as *Helianthus maximiliani* or **Maximilian Sunflower**. You can find seeds of this and our “old-fashioned sunflowers” in many seed catalogs — especially those specializing in wildflowers or heritage plants.

Heliotropium – Heliotrope

Heliotropium peruvianum; arborescens



“Open your heart and mind like the wings of a butterfly. See then how high you can fly.” — Zeenat Aman

This attractive garden annual grows well in the hot summer sun. The heat makes a pervasive vanilla, almond, or ‘baby powder’ perfume spread across your garden. This scent draws our noses closer to the flower clusters and the attention of the neighborhood butterflies.

Heliotrope, native to Peru, became trendy in the late 19th century because of the flower color and fragrance. British reference books called it the “Cherry Pie Plant” for the color of the flowers. The color is supposedly similar to pouring milk on a slice of wild black cherry pie.

The mixing of the dark red fruit with the milk forms a dark blue or purple slurry. I think it ruins a delicious cherry pie.

Heliotrope is also an excellent container subject, so remember to pot up a few for the patio. It loves to grow in full sunlight, well-drained, fertile soil. By all means, protect this plant from frost, for it is susceptible to cold.

The best varieties to grow are **Old Fashion Purple** having dark blue to light blue flower clusters and a superb fragrance. **Fragrant Delight** has deeper purple flowers, while **White Heliotrope** has powder-blue flowers when young and then changes to pure white when older.

Lantana

Lantana camara



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“He said that we belonged together because he was born with a flower and I was born with a butterfly and that flowers and butterflies need each other for survival.” – Gemma Malley from “The Declaration”

I love this woody tropical shrub for its dazzling red, orange, pink, and bright yellow flower clusters. My fault with it (with no real fault of its own making) is the slow growth with limited blooming for northern areas during the summer. In warm southerly locations with a longer

growing season, this shrub will produce taller branches and be in constant bloom.

Those living in warm climates try to grow the taller and bushier varieties—some to over four feet tall. They will look great in flower beds but plant some in larger containers for a patio or deck. Here you can get more acquainted with the neighborhood butterflies and hummingbirds.

These low-maintenance plants prefer hot weather to thrive, full sunlight, and toleration of drier soil conditions for limited periods.

The foliage has a somewhat disagreeable order when handled, but, like Marigolds (*Tagetes*), plant them and don't bother handling them all summer.

You can find potted plants of different colorful varieties in many garden centers. You may find a source for seed — but why bother? Potted plants are ready to grow and attract all those butterflies, day-flying moths, and hummingbirds to your outdoor areas. Come one, come all to enjoy your floral extravaganza!

Leucanthemum – Shasta Daisy

Leucanthemum x superbum or *Chrysanthemum X superbum*



Common Wood Nymph (*Cercyonis pegala*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Happiness is like a butterfly: the more you chase it, the more it will elude you, but if you turn your attention to other things, it will come and sit softly on your shoulder.” — Henry David Thoreau

Let’s face it — other than roses, this has to be the predominant, long-lasting wildflower of historical significance. There are plenty of these flowers for us to pick and butterflies to flutter on from spring through summer.

The American horticulturist, and plant breeder extraordinaire Luther Burbank (1849 to 1926), had a brilliant idea. He wished to breed a new daisy, one that behaved itself and not becomes weedy. He wanted one that was hardy, floriferous, and grew best in a garden instead of “in the wild.”

After 17 years of exhaustive breeding work, he created the world-famous Shasta Daisy, named after Mount Shasta in California. Seventeen years of laborious breeding work to make a new flower — think of that!

Today, the large daisies sold in garden centers and those grown in our gardens are variations of his stunning plant. Being of wild heritage stock, this perennial is hardy and versatile in whatever soil types and conditions. As long as they grow in plenty of sunlight, these plants will thrive.

You can grow these perennials from seed, but purchasing plants (like Shasta and other newer varieties) can give quicker and longer blooming.

They are hardy from zones 4 to 9 and love to bask in full to partial sunlight. Make sure you raise them in well-drained, fertile soil for best growth and bloom.

Monarda – Bee Balm

Monarda didyma



“The caterpillar does all the work, but the butterfly gets all the publicity.” — George Carlin

To attract all the hummingbirds and butterflies in your neighborhood, you need to include this dazzling perennial in your garden. It is one of the longest blooming and definitely the showiest, with vivid red to purple flower clusters. Their hardiness is from zones 3 to 10.

Related to the mints (but less invasive), the colorful flower clusters generally lack a scent, but the leaves have a pronounced minty-orange fragrance.

Native to the eastern half of North America, native *Monarda* grows in moist woods and along stream banks. It has common names such as Bee Balm and Oswego Tea. While the butterflies and hummingbirds drink the abundant floral nectar, treat yourself to a glass of ice tea while watching them on a delightful summer afternoon.

These plants can rapidly spread in rich soil but are manageable. They enjoy full sun to part shade to grow and bloom well.

Many varieties are available, but **Jacob Cline** (shown above) is one of the largest bright red types with outstanding mildew disease resistance. The size of these magnificent red flowers is incredible — one flower-head can rest in the palm of your hand.

Check your local garden centers for many types of these splendid perennials.

Monardas (and other garden plants) are susceptible to fungal problems during the summer. For the sake of butterfly and hummingbird health, never apply fungicide (or insecticide) to your plants. When shopping at garden centers, always look for disease-resistant varieties.

Phlox – Garden Phlox

Phlox paniculata



Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Love is a peaceful feeling, like a flower hugging a butterfly.” — Jarod Kintz

The Garden Phlox is an extensive and diverse group of plants. Professional landscapers considered them as “the backbone of a perennial garden” because of their hardiness, long-blooming, and very colorful flower displays. One feature not noted is their fragrance. I guess that’s not a top priority. They have an aroma that resembles peanut butter, almonds, or some other warm, nutty scent.

With the heat of a summer's day and colorful flowers exuding a delicious aroma, what more could the neighborhood butterflies enjoy? How about sweet nectar to sip? Yes, there is plenty for them to enjoy.

Garden Phlox needs plenty of sunlight, fertile soil, and good drainage to grow well. Plant height, on average, is above three feet tall. Garden Phlox blooms midsummer to fall and are hardy from zones 3 to 9.

There are so many recommended varieties to grow, but **David** represents the best white garden phlox and possibly the best Phlox—period. It has large, pure white flowers that are also highly fragrant with almonds or peanuts (in my nasal opinion).

This variety has excellent disease resistance, so you do not have to spray chemicals on the leaves. It blooms mid to late summer and is ideal for an evening fragrance garden. Many landscapers feel this phlox is the best to grow—and I agree with them!

There are many other colorful and fragrant varieties 'out there'. Let your eyes and nose help you find them.

Rudbeckia – Black-Eyed Susan

Rudbeckia hirta



“I embrace emerging experience. I participate in discovery. I am a butterfly. I am not a butterfly collector. I want the experience of the butterfly.” – William Stafford

You have probably seen this bright, three-inch diameter, yellow or orange daisy blooming in parks, public gardens, office building plantings, and in your neighbor’s flower beds or borders. *“Those flowers are beautiful,”* you thought but gave no further attention until now. Not only do they highlight a flower garden for most of the summer, but they also attract many colorful butterflies.

Commonly called “Black-Eyed Susan,” this hardy (zones 4 to 9) perennial is famous for being relatively maintenance-free and long-blooming throughout the summer. Bred from wild-stock of North American prairie heritage, these plants can tolerate heat, dry soil conditions, and occasional neglect.

They can suffer from extended periods of soggy soil, so make sure your ground is well-drained. Don’t worry about fertility, for they seem to grow best (and be healthier) if not over-fertilized.

The only downside of these plants is they can be short-lived perennials. The blossoms can produce many seeds, which weakens the plant and may not survive a winter. The upside is you will have new plants springing up in the spring. The best seedlings will grow, and before you know it, they will be blooming.

One of the best and extensively grown varieties available is **Goldsturm**, having brilliant yellow petals with a dark brown to black central cone — the “black-eye.” It grows to over three feet tall, is bushy, producing boat-loads of daisies for most of the summer.

Although many varieties have variations of the bright yellow and dark center flowers, new types are being bred, showcasing unexpected colors. Be sure to grow **Cherry Brandy**, which has vibrant reddish or burgundy petals.

Scabiosa – Pincushion

Scabiosa atropurpurea



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*)

“I only ask to be free. The butterflies are free.” — Charles Dickens from “Bleak House.”

This constant blooming garden annual will supply you with bucket-loads of long-stemmed cut flowers all summer. Not only does it flaunt colorful petals, but it also provides plenty of nectar for the butterflies.

Scabiosa can also provide you with desperate small-talk material when trapped with neighbors, family members, and friends after discussions of work, sports, politics, and the weather becomes depleted. Here, you

tell them this annual has blooms resembling pincushions — which prompts you to explain what a pincushion is and its function.

Afterward, you can lecture them about this plant's Latin generic name, which refers to the medical condition called scabies in which tiny mites burrow under the skin epidermis. Talk about parasites will always liven up a conversation, especially if referenced to the movie "*Alien*." You will then enlighten them that this plant does not attract such alien mites, but rubbing the leaves on the skin helps ease the constant itchiness caused by them. If these talking points fail to impress your friends, you can consistently demonstrate your profound knowledge of the butterfly species fluttering between the flowers.

If you have made it this far in talking about this plant, congratulations, for it is rare to engage in a candid one-sided discussion about botanical names and histories. I bore most people to tears about such talks, but you're a gardener, and such things interest you (and me).

Oh well, back to the subject of this plant. It is low-maintenance and low-care and is easy to plant in the garden from sown seed or transplants. Most selections are mixed colors, but you can get separate colors, including the famous "almost black" flower color, from online seed catalogs. Plant them in full sunlight and well-drained soil. Please don't fuss over soil fertility, for less-than-ideal conditions are best for plant growth and bloom.

Most growers recommend planting it with other taller growing annuals to act as supports to prevent the flowers from flopping over. Try to keep them from forming seeds (thus the reason for constant cutting for the house) to keep them blooming. By fall, allow some plants to go to seed. This helps to re-seed them for new growth in the spring.

It can re-grow as a perennial for gardeners in warmer climates and form larger plants by summer. More flowers for the butterflies!

Sedum – Stonecrop

Sedum spectabile; ternatum or acre



Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Butterflies add another dimension to the garden, for they are like dream flowers - childhood dreams - which have broken loose from their stalks and escaped into the sunshine.” – Miriam Rothschild

Some perennials are never acknowledged as being “the most popular plant” to grow in gardens. Sedum is a textbook example of this misguided appraisal. They are one of the most carefree garden and landscaping plants. Once planted, they usually thrive (and multiply) without too much help — but would appreciate some attention and

admiration now and then. Butterflies pay attention to them from spring to fall, depending on which Sedum species are blooming.

One reason for this apparent apathy is that most people consider them boring for not having vibrantly colorful flowers or blooming into the fall.

These are poor excuses, for all Sedum species and varieties have excellent qualities for growing in all gardens. They tolerate full sun and dry soil. Having succulent leaves, they do not have to be watered often. This is ideal when planting in sandy or gravelly soil and exposed to dry locations.

There is an old joke about why they have the common name of “stonecrop.” The punchline is they live longer and need less care than stones and rocks. (Insert drum rimshot and cymbal “ba-dum-ching” sound here.) There is only one precaution to keep in mind when growing all Sedum, and it is to never plant them in constant wet soil, for the stems and roots will rot.

The succulent leaves can exhibit beautiful colors, including variegations. Most varieties display shades of dark purple, reddish-orange (or a dull copper,) golden yellow, and green blended with white or yellow. Depending on the species and type, a plant will have clusters of star-shaped rose-pink, white or yellow flowers.

Now, let’s get to the vital aspect of what type of Sedum to grow in your garden. It depends on how you want to display them.

There are two classifications of Sedum plants. You can choose taller growth or relaxed or sprawling varieties. The upright growers (such as *Sedum spectabile* ‘**Autumn Delight**’) have larger succulent leaves on one to three-foot stems.

The time of blooming is also different. The upright varieties, like **Autumn Joy**, bloom spectacularly in the late summer through the fall. In contrast, the lax-growers typically bloom from spring to early summer, but their flowers are less showy. The principal attraction of these groundcovers is their colorful leaves.

Solidago – Goldenrod

Solidago altissima and other species



Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Morguefile.com

“Someday, I will be a beautiful butterfly, and then everything will be better.” — from the movie “A Bug’s Life.”

Some wildflower species can become troublesome and invasive. Then there are some beautiful “weeds” you do not think of as being weeds. Goldenrods are splendid examples. You will forget about weed-phobia when admiring their tall, bright yellow flower clusters for several weeks from mid to late summer.

Long popular in Europe as valued garden plants, the opposite is true for gardeners in North America. One primary reason is that Goldenrod is

not just one or two species but nearly 140 species and varieties. It's challenging to get excited about these flowers when blooming simultaneously with hay fever causing Ragweed (*Ambrosia psilostachya*).

People have misunderstood in believing Goldenrod causes the hay fever allergy. Its flowers have sticky pollen and produce nectar to attract pollinating insects. Ragweed has dust-like pollen, and it is common to see clouds of it floating in the air and being carried by the prevailing wind to allergy sufferers miles away.

As more American gardeners know that Goldenrod does not contribute to hay fever, they are more receptive to adding this attractive perennial to their gardens. Suppose you do not prefer the stately seven-foot-tall-plus species. There are now new dwarf varieties or hybrids available you can plant for late summer enjoyment.

All plants — tall and short — are hardy from zones 3 to 9 and prefer to grow in full sun and moist, fertile soil.

By late summer, there are many insects taking advantage of the tremendous number of nectar-packed florets. There are various species of butterflies present, along with wasps, honeybees, bumblebees, and colorful beetles. There is a large assortment of "bugs" that compete for pollen and nectar at this time of year.

You can purchase seeds from wildflower seed companies. Larger garden centers and nurseries may offer dwarf hybrid varieties.

Tagetes – Marigold

Tagetes patula; erecta



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail (*Papilio glaucus*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Today a caterpillar – tomorrow a butterfly. Don’t lose hope because you never know what tomorrow will bring.” — A Proverb

Earlier in this ebook, I mentioned that Calendula’s (*Calendula officinalis*) nickname is Pot Marigold. Now, this plant also has the name of Marigold. Hey, what gives? Over time and generations, people misidentified plants and attached the popular name they think is to a similar-looking plant.

If you look at both Calendula and Tagetes flowers, they have a “somewhat” familiar resemblance. Technically, the leaves and stems

look different, but who cares about them? It's all about the flowers. So, the common name of Marigold stuck for both plants.

Herbalists and gardeners-of-old named each plant in honor of the Virgin Mary. Since the native flowers (of both types) are yellow, the name eventually became Mary's Gold and was later shortened to Marigold.

The trouble is, gardeners continue to have a preference in the naming rights to honor Mary. Anyway, let's not lose sleep over this dispute and get back to describing *Tagetes* Marigolds.

These floriferous annual garden flowers are simple to sow and grow. The large-flowered varieties are African Marigolds (*Tagetes erecta*). In contrast, the smaller-flowered ones are the French Marigolds (*Tagetes patula*) even though they originated in Mexico and South America — go figure!

The African varieties (sometimes more accurately called Mexican or Aztec marigolds) can grow up to four feet and are bushy. Most varieties have large, fully double flower heads. The French types grow smaller and have single-petal or semi-double heads. The single-petal French types are the ones that attract more butterflies over the summer. It is easier for the butterflies to reach inside the florets better without having to “dig” through excessive petals to get to the nectar, unlike those of the African varieties.

You can find French varieties having bright yellow, orange, burnish red petals. Yes, not much of a color selection, but there are plenty of shades and flower sizes.

A few smaller growing species have laced or fern-like green leaves, which have a strong lemon or citrus fragrance when handled. These are the Gem Series Marigolds, for they have small, single, bright yellow or orange petals covering the plant during most of the summer. Many people, including those who dislike most marigolds, enjoy the delicate nature of this species.

All Marigolds prefer plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil. Any consistently wet ground will rot the roots and stems. They can tolerate less-than fertile soil, but giving them a light feeding over the summer would be beneficial. They can go several days without water, but if no rain is in sight, take the time to give them a quenching drink of water.

Marigold seed is cheap, and they grow and bloom nonstop until a fall frost or collapse from excessive bloom exhaustion.

I always think of Marigolds as Plan B when growing summer annuals. If your first choice of bloomers fails to grow, you can sow Marigolds for fast-paced, blooming enjoyment. The butterflies will also enjoy your quick thinking and acting to provide lovely colors and fast-food meals.

Tithonia – Mexican Sunflower

Tithonia rotundifolia



Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*)

“May the wings of the butterfly kiss the sun, and find your shoulder to light on, to bring you luck, happiness, and riches, today, tomorrow, and beyond.” — An Irish Blessing

Native to Mexico and Central America, these daisy-like flowers provide the favorite hangout for all the neighborhood butterflies and hummingbirds throughout the summer. They zero in on these reddish-orange or yellow flat-topped blossoms, which must exude plenty of nectar.

This is another one of those plants labeled as “butterfly magnets,” for it is common to see several butterflies fluttering and tip-toeing in the center of each blossom. They appear deep in concentration, so you can get up close to photograph them.

Unlike most relatives of sunflowers, this eye-catching annual plant only grows to an average of five feet tall, with large deep green leaves and vibrant, orange-red to pure yellow, daisy-like flowers. Over the summer, one plant can produce several side branches, highlighting several of these long-stemmed flowers to enjoy from summer to fall.

Tithonia is easy to grow from seed and raise in any garden as long as it grows in full sunlight and less fertile soil. It is one of the most drought tolerant tall-growing flowers you can grow in a garden. You don't have to worry about watering it if you are away for an extended period.

Varieties called **Torch**, **Yellow Torch**, and **Sundance** are available as seeds from many catalogs and garden centers. The seeds are large enough to handle and so simple to insert into the soil.

Trifolium – Red Clover

Trifolium pratense



Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“I dreamed I was a butterfly, flitting around in the sky; then I awoke. Now I wonder: Am I a man who dreamt of being a butterfly or am I a butterfly dreaming that I am a man?” — Chuang Tzu

Gardeners consider Red Clover a weed. Grow weeds in the garden? Yes. Please calm down. Technically, a weed is a misplaced plant growing where not wanted. The plant has lost its way. To solve this dilemma means to rip, hoe, and stamp it out. You want it out — period.

White Clover is more of a nuisance in lawns but helps soil fertility. Red Clover is a taller, more sturdy plant worthy of adding to a fragrance or

butterfly garden. Growing as a short-lived perennial, this plant will not be invasive in your garden.

The flower-heads are a beautiful purple/red, while the stems have three leaflets, each having an attractive white “V-shape” pattern.

Red Clover is also fragrant, having that unique perfume of its own. Growing up on a farm, I have pleasant memories of viewing acres of this clover and related Alfalfa plants in full bloom. The sight and smell of colorful flower heads were breathtaking. Clouds of large and small butterflies were constantly darting back and forth among the blossoms.

Hardy from zones 4 to 9, raise these plants in full to partial sunshine and well-drained soil.

Many companies specializing in selling wildflowers or agricultural seeds should have this species available, for it is easy to grow. I have never seen nursery plants offered to gardeners.

The neighborhood bees and butterflies will love you if you grow this poor, neglected plant.

Verbena – Purple-top Vervain or Brazilian Vervain

Verbena bonariensis



Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Pixabay.com

“Butterflies... flowers that fly and all but sing.” — Robert Frost

Here is a garden plant that is simple, elegant, and beautiful when being showcased in the garden border. Its long, sturdy stems branch out in smaller stems, culminating in many small pinkish-purple florets. You would think they are not worth bothering with, but appearances can be misleading. Their long stems and floral clusters add an air of lightness and loftiness.

For additional garden enjoyment, these delicate flowers attract several butterflies from around the neighborhood. Some, possibly all, butterfly experts label this plant as another example of a butterfly-magnet capable of enticing butterflies to land on the flower heads to partake in the heartily imbibing of sweet nectar.

Raise this plant by seed sown in the early spring. Germination can take time, so be patient. The plants prefer to grow in sunny, well-drained, but fertile soil.

Now don't faint on me, but mature plants can get to a height of nearly six feet, but usually less. They will become bushy with all those tall branching stems. You can place these plants in the back of a border or in the center of a flower bed.

Although classified as an annual, it can be perennial if you live in zones 7 to 10 (lucky you.) In these zones, the plants can become very large and, sometimes, borderline weedy — to the point of being invasive.

Being an excellent gardener, you know the drill on clipping off spent flowers to prevent re-seeding. I can think of several flowers that are or can become serious weedy problems. Maybe this is one such plant, but since it attracts several butterflies, is it such a high crime to grow more plants?

Zinnia

Zinnia elegans



Black Swallowtail (*Papilio polyxenes*)

“Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee.” — “The Greatest Boxer”, Muhammad Ali

You may have sensed a pattern by now with several butterfly-approved flowers. We have previously reviewed the Calendulas, Cornflowers, Sunflowers, Mexican Sunflowers, Shasta Daisy, and Marigolds. They and Zinnias belong in the same broad family of plants called Composites. They all have a similar floral appearance.

Like them, Zinnias are simple to grow from self-sown seeds and easy to nurture in any garden. Many varieties have a broad range of vivid colors

and sizes. The most important quality is being able to bloom for most of the summer.

As an annual, you can sow or sprinkle the flattened seed of Zinnias in a well-prepared, well-drained bed exposed to as much sunlight as possible for best blooming.

Zinnias are our most dependable cottage garden favorites, providing a valuable nectar source for all bees and butterflies. Well, to a point, for not all zinnia varieties are of particular interest to many butterflies. The problem lies with the fully double-flowered varieties. They are beautiful and popular to include in gardens, but their excessive disc floret petals prevent butterflies from searching for nectar.

Those varieties with an open center area with exposed bright yellow disc florets are what butterflies enjoy most. Here, these small florets are accessible for the butterflies to search for each blossom's interior store of nectar. Several varieties appear to produce more nectar than others. So, which ones can you grow to get maximum butterfly activity in your garden?

There are so many varieties to choose from, but I would recommend growing a hybrid variety. Why hybrids? The simple answer is resistance to the powdery mildew fungal disease. Old-fashioned Zinnias are notorious for being susceptible to this disease. Hybrid plants are more disease-resistant. Thus, they grow and bloom better.

Hybrids are the way to go for more enjoyment. You can find hybrid Zinnia seeds from many seed catalogs and garden centers.

Look for the hybrid **Profusion Series**, which is shorter with a wide range of colors. They are perfect for containers if you have limited garden space. Another popular butterfly attractor is the hybrid **Zowie!™ Flame Zinnias**. One particular selection is the Yellow Flame that begins as yellow but changes color as it ages. This one has prominent central cone florets, which the butterflies find irresistible in accessing the nectar.

For maximum butterfly enjoyment, sow the seeds of the multi-colored variety called **Lilliput**. I read where butterflies absolutely love to visit this variety. It is an heirloom type and not a hybrid. As I mentioned before, it is susceptible to powdery mildew fungus by mid to late summer by not being a hybrid. Oh well, the butterflies do not mind.

The Night-Shift Butterflies

“When the moon arrives in the darkness, The moth appears at the disappearance of sunlight. It flickers its pale wings as it shakes from its deep slumber, To go search for food, To carry it through the night....” – Suzy Kassem

All is fine and dandy growing and enjoying gorgeous day-blooming garden flowers for butterflies, but what about our night-shift lepidopterans, commonly called moths? My central premise for this ebook is highlighting the best-blooming flowers for butterflies. Well, you can also grow several flowers for nighttime enjoyment.

Forgive me for planting a blatant self-serving advertisement here, but I have authored another ebook called ***The Night-Blooming Shift: Nocturnal Garden Flowers***. This ebook describes those garden plants that can attract moths to pollinate their flowers. Night-blooming flowers tend to be white to pale yellow and fragrant. These qualities are ideal for attracting moths. The problem for many of us is we are asleep while the moths pollinate these moonlit flowers throughout the night.

For most people, moths are unattractive, mysterious, and downright disgusting. It used to be (maybe still is) people would freak out if a small moth fluttered into a house. My mother was such a person. She would scream and then perform a bizarre tarantella dance style, repeatedly clapping her hands in the air, trying to crush the winged invader. The idea was that a single moth would find your clothes, lay eggs, and a few weeks later, hordes of new moths would erupt out of the closets. All the clothing would be “moth-ridden” with many small holes. Wool carpeting and valuable old papers were also under siege by voracious moth caterpillars.

Not all moths are militaristic insects hell-bent on making us wear tattered clothing. Some are so attractive and ethereal, while others look fierce and frightening. Allow me a few minutes of your reading time to tell you a couple true stories involving two magnificent moths worth seeing.

Eons ago, I sat in the stands watching a little league softball game involving my youngest nephew. It was a warm, early summer evening game witnessed by plenty of hyperactive, sugar-imbibed mini-mighty Casey-like sluggers. In the stands were their equally hyperactive, caffeine-imbibed parents and bored siblings. All I remember of that game was the abrupt ending.

At sunset, with mosquito squadrons buzzing near our ears, there were sudden shouts and high-pitched screams from the players. Startled spectators jumped off their butts and jerked heads swung back and forth, trying to locate and understand the commotion.



Luna Moth (*Actias luna*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Creative Commons

The game spoiler was the sudden arrival of an outstanding, large, and gorgeous **Luna Moth** (*Actias luna*), shown above, fluttering near the ground, past the stands, and then into left field. Shouts and mayhem

erupted from both teams. I remember the constant screeches of *"IT'S A FAIRY! IT'S A FAIRY!"*

Hordes of children from both teams and spectators ran after this giant winged moth. All those flapping hands horrified me, some swinging with leather gloves, desperate to clutch and clobber that periled pixie.

Around me were a cacophony of shouting and laughing parents, along with screaming and crying children. My plea of "please don't hurt it. It's a rare Luna moth!" became lost within the amplified noise.

The fortunate Tinkerbell moth evaded its pack of predatory athletic tots by flapping those angelic sea-green wings over a chain-link fence and into a neighboring lawn and garden. The children's shouting ended, becoming replaced with constant sobbing. The disappointment that "the green fairy" had gotten away was heartbreaking to some adults, hilariously comical by others.

My heart, fortunately, returned to its normal beating rhythm. To think, I expressed empathy to an insect, but it was so beautiful and is rarely seen. The gentle flapping of its wings, just high enough above the rapid flapping of kiddy fingers, was surreal.

The game ended, for no one cared to continue playing. All I knew was "that moth" made the best play of the game — and miraculously survived.

Another story, fortunately for you, is short. I came across the following moth one summer evening while watering a bed of flowers. Nestled underneath them and on the ground was this character.



Io Moth (Automeris io)

Called *Automeris io* or the **Io Moth**, the sight of it (shown above being upside down for dramatic effect) nearly made me wet my pants — and not by the watering can mind you.

After my heart restarted, I calmly realized this was a night-flying moth and not some big-eyed, sharp-toothed creature. (My first thought was a snake — a poisonous viper ready to strike.) That is what Nature wants you, me, and any other night critter to believe. It is an excellent example of a phenomenon called mimicry — being something you are not.

This moth is one of a group of giant silkworm moths and uses these wing spots to mimic the eyes of something ferocious. It displays a “you better get away NOW” idea. That suggestion worked perfectly for me. Gardening can become a scary affair.

The Day-Shift Moths



Hummingbird Clearwing Moth (*Hemaris thysbe*)

“I’ve always preferred moths to butterflies. They aren’t flashy or cocky; they mind their own business and just try to blend in with their surroundings and live their lives. They don’t want to be seen, and that’s something I can relate to.” — Kayla Krantz

Not all moths are night-critters. A few brave lepidopterans fly during the day, seeking any nectar-filled flower. They have a unique trick that few other butterflies and moths can perform.

The **Hummingbird Clearwing Moth** (*Hemaris thysbe*), shown above drinking from a zinnia, and the **Snowberry Clearwing Moth** (*Hemaris diffinis*) closely resemble a hummingbird — fooling many people and

predatory birds — while hovering over flowers with their rapid-beating, blurry-viewed wings.

I have disagreed with people while trying to convince them these are moths instead of hummingbirds. “*Moths fly at night, butterflies and hummingbirds fly during the day,*” they argue. No matter how I try to correct them, they will not listen.

The problem is, to paraphrase what Sherlock Holmes told Dr. Watson, they look, but they fail to observe. This is another exceptional case of mimicry. These moths have long coiled proboscises for sucking up flower nectar, and their long antennae give away their avian impersonation.

These moths belong in the amazing Sphinx Moth family — yes, it sounds like they are of Egyptian heritage but are not. They have thick bodies covered with furry scales. Their colors range from reddish-brown to dark brown with occasional yellow banding.

Male moths have tail-like flared scales resembling feathers. It is this and their rapidly beating transparent wings that fool people into insisting they are hummingbirds.

As for their taste for nectar, they will easily hover beside any of the above-described flowers.

Conclusion



Orange Sulphur butterfly (*Colias eurytheme*) – CC0 Photo courtesy of Morguefile.com

“Although the butterfly and the caterpillar are completely different, they are one and the same.” — Kendrick Lamar

You can entice many butterflies to visit your summer-blooming flowers. The above species and varieties are easy to grow and quick to bloom.

You will notice a common structural theme to most flowers all butterflies visit. They offer them a flat “landing” platform. These daisy-based-looking flowers provide a simple way for them to suckle nectar and rest after extensive flying. Some blossoms are circular but still provide a stable structure to hold on to.

In the above ***Introduction*** section, I included a thought-provoking quote by Ponce Denis Écouchard Lebrun. I experienced an actual representation of Lebrun's words in the hot summer of 2012.

For a few weeks, I encountered “flying flowers” on a grand scale in my garden. Several acres of farm fields containing clover and alfalfa for hay baling surround my home. These are the host plants for the caterpillars of the beautiful yellow and bright orange small butterflies called the **Orange Sulphur butterfly** (*Colias eurytheme*), shown above.

The conditions were perfect that summer for a massive “blooming” of the metamorphosed caterpillars into adult butterflies. There were millions of these insects fluttering their small wings in the acre-airspace.

By a surprising coincidence, I had trouble growing some annuals along both sides of a parched, sun-drenched garden pathway that summer. The original plants failed to develop because of the heat, so I resorted to Plan B — raising French Marigolds for their color and rapid growth. The marigolds were a mixture of single and semi-double yellow and orangish-red types. It was perfect timing when the abundant blooming marigolds attracted a fraction of those abundant nectar-hungry butterflies.

At times, their pulsating wings would launch into the air, flapping wildly about me, and then gently flutter down again onto the marigolds. It was as if all the marigold petals took flight but, at the same time, remained on the plants. This was not a one-time occurrence, for they constantly repeated it all day and daily for over a week.

Not only did I experience this fantastic show but also several other people in the surrounding region of the state. Eventually, local newspapers reported about the great butterfly invasion.

That was then, and I may never experience another incredible encounter like this again. But it will always thrill me to see whatever butterfly flutters by and stops at my flower garden.

One Final Thought...

“A butterfly lights beside us like a sunbeam, and for a brief moment, its glory and beauty belong to our world... but then it flies again, and though we wish it could have stayed... we feel lucky to have seen it.” — Author Unknown

I know of a person who once told me that butterflies “... *are just big bugs, and all bugs should die.*” Horrified at that statement, I could only shake my head. I later thought that person must have been a spider in a former life and still is in human form. If you are around people like that, keep away from them at all costs. Don't let them suck the life out of all things delightful for you.

How can you not be so overwhelmed by the sheer beauty and wonder of a butterfly? Bedazzled by the brilliant wing colors and awe of how it transforms from a caterpillar into a colorful masterpiece. This is the process called metamorphosis — the changing of one form into a completely different one. It can also be a spiritual or psychological transformation.

Instead of concentrating on negative feelings, we need to focus on the positive qualities. We hang on tightly to childhood fears and silly hateful prejudices. We need to “better ourselves” in expressing open-mindedness and being intellectually curious.

It's never too late to discover some happiness when the world is bleak and depressing. All it takes is to appreciate the surrounding beauty each day.

Be like a butterfly and visit all those gorgeous flowers available to you.

Thank you for reading this ebook.

“An author’s great day is releasing your book into the world like a butterfly and having a reviewer come upon it and say...oh, that’s lovely!” – Nanette L. Avery

I hope you have enjoyed reading this ebook about growing fabulous garden flowers that attract butterflies. Not only do these flowers offer outstanding beauty, but your local butterflies also add enjoyment to flower gardening.

My other ebooks also list garden flowers which also attract a kaleidoscope of butterflies.

Please visit my author website of <https://gedwinvarner.com> concerning these and other ebooks, along with contact information.

About the Author

G. Edwin Varner grew up on a farm, helping his father in the crop fields and assisting his mother in the flower and vegetable gardens. This experience and learning led him to receive a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology with a minor in Botany.

He successfully owned and operated a fragrant flower mail-order nursery for twenty years. Unlike most mail-order nurseries publishing colorful but expensive pictorial catalogs, his frugal catalog extensively described the flowers he grew. He once said, “I write a thousand words worth a picture in my catalogs.” Today, he has the same style of writing (thankfully with fewer words) through a variety of enjoyable and informative ebooks. This time, the ebooks include color photos of each flower.

He encourages you to cultivate something unique and beautiful in your gardens. His motto is “Read about it, see it, grow it, and enjoy it!”

G. Edwin Varner lives in a rural area of northeastern Ohio, USA.