

Creating a Butterfly Friendly Garden

Expected butterflies

All the whites which include Large White, Small White, Green Veined White and Orange Tip (spring).

Also in the spring to summer expect Meadow Brown, Ringlet (spring) and Gatekeeper.

Summer/late particularly on Buddleias and purple flowers, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Comma plus Red Admiral and Painted Lady.

You could attract Small Copper and Common Blue which are beautiful small butterflies.

Sourcing suitable plants

a) The garden centres only provide a minimum number of plants that are suitable for butterflies; these must be yellow, red, pink or purple flowers. Unfortunately we have changed many natural plants to be commercial and these are not suitable for butterflies.

b) Recommended plants from Garden Centres: Buddia purple variety, Erysimum purple variety, English lavender, Common valerian and if available Wild Marjoram. My favourite is Erysimum (wall flower), it flowers all year and attracts many butterflies. It has to be the purple variety and I would suggest you cut it back in October.

c) See below for plants that are important and easy to grow.

The following are low lying plants, only up to 6 inches high

1. Wild Marjoram, Wild Basil, Wild Thyme to be planted in a sunny area.
2. Birdsfoot Trefoil - very important plant for both nectar and food for caterpillars - ideal for ground cover.
3. Black Medic.
4. Common Dog Violet - very important plant for both nectar and food for caterpillars must have shade.
5. Common Rock Rose - sunny position, very important plant for both nectar and food for caterpillars.
6. Horseshoe Vetch - very important but specialised only on limestone and chalk.
7. Common Sorrel - food source for Small Copper caterpillars, my favourite butterfly. Plant also ideal for flower pots.
8. Cowslips - important plant for spring butterflies and beautiful small yellow flowers. (Do not buy from garden centres).
9. Tormentil - one of my favourites. Small yellow flowers in spring. ideal for ground cover.
10. Common Basel - attracts all butterflies, also bees. Spreads very quickly.

The following are Medium height flowering plants 6 to 28 inches

1. **Common Fleabane** - important for Gatekeeper, wet area.
2. **Oxeye Daisy** - attracts all butterflies.
3. **Wild Mignonette** - whites only.
4. **Rudbeckia**.
5. **Bettany** - spreads very quickly.
6. **Field Scabious** - also **Small Scabious** dry soil and **Devil's Bit Scabious** all have fantastic purple flowers, attract many butterflies. My favourite is **Devil's Bit Scabious**.
7. **Hawkweed**.
8. **Red clover** - excellent for numerous butterflies.
9. **Maiden Pink** - this is a ground covering plant and will spread, however produces glorious small dark pink/purple flower.
10. **Cuckoo flower** - this plant provides food for all the white butterfly species and caterpillars.
11. **Garlic Mustard** - this plant provides food for all the white butterfly species and caterpillars.
12. **Wild strawberry** (not from garden centre) - this will spread but provides nectar for spring butterflies.
13. **Ragged Robin** - bright red flower in the spring likes it wet.



Slightly larger plants but excellent for large number of butterflies

1. **Common Knapweed**.
2. **Greater Knapweed**.
3. **Thistles**, **Melancholy** variety in my opinion the most attractive and is perennial.
4. **Hemp Agrimony**.

I would also strongly recommend for large flower pots, **Lavender** and **Nasturtiums** (this provides food for all whites, caterpillars and butterflies - cautionary note when pruning as whites chrysalis hibernates in this plant.)

When to plant - early March or late October.



A large number of butterflies require wild grasses for their caterpillar, which also provide shelter for hibernation.

If you have space I would recommend the following -

- 1. Cocksfoot for Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Wall, Large Skipper, Essex Skipper and Small Skipper.**
- 2. Common Bent for Gatekeeper, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Wall.**
- 3. Sheeps Fescue for Marbled White, and Small Heath.**
- 4. Yorkshire Fog for Marbled White, Small Skipper, Wall, Speckled Wood.**

If you are replacing existing grass, you will need to remove top layer, dig over and rake before seeding. If large area would also suggest seeding with Yellow Rattles which is a parasitic plant.

I use Emorsgate Seeds tel. 01553 829028, they will provide a pamphlet which is very practical with all seeds available.

For trees, Oak offers the most diverse insect and butterfly support followed by Wych Elm, Willow, Maple, Lime and Ash, however, this is in serious decline due to a fungal disease carried by Beetles.

We have also planted bushes that include Wild Privet, Dogwood, Goats Willow, and Alder Buckthorn. All these are important for certain butterflies.

Also Holly (female) and Ivy are important, especially letting the Ivy flower which offers food for a number of butterflies particularly the Holly Blue which is common.

If you plant in spring it will take 2 years for the plugs, quicker for small plants, to attract the butterflies. However, what is crucial is once you have attracted your butterflies you are their custodian and if the environment you have created is removed or destroyed you will kill the butterflies that rely on you.

No responsibility then!!!!

Places that sell less common plants

You can purchase any of the above plants online from specialised nature centres.

Naturescape from Nottingham and Cumbria Wildflower, all sent by special mail. These plants are not expensive and usually come as plugs, 10 plugs costing about £10, also available as small plants.

Written by Chris Ragg