

# Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

## FACT SHEET



**Have Gardening Questions?** The **Master Gardener Help Line Hours** are 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. on Fridays (all year) as well as Wednesdays (March-November) and Mondays (April-October).  
Phone: 617-933-4929 Email: [mghepline@masshort.org](mailto:mghepline@masshort.org).

## Butterfly Gardens

Butterflies are beautiful, colorful insects, a delight to watch in the garden. Butterflies visit a garden not for our enjoyment but to look for food and places to lay their eggs. To attract butterflies in your garden, it takes just a little knowledge. Gardens for butterflies can be large, small or even in containers; the basic requirements are always the same.

Butterflies need:

**FOOD:** Butterflies drink nectar, a sweet liquid found in flower blossoms, as their food source. Butterflies use their long proboscis like a straw to drink the fluid from flower tubules.

**WARMTH:** Butterflies need to warm their wings in order to fly. At temperatures below 60 ° F their body fluid thickens and limits their wing movement. (Most nectar flowers are full sun plants also).

**SHELTER:** Butterflies need shelter from wind. Strong breezes make it harder for them to land to feed; it inhibits their flight and uses up their energy.

**WATER:** Besides nectar, butterflies drink water from shallow pools like a mud puddle (not birdbaths). A rock with a depression or saucer filled with sand and water to form a small depressed pool works well.

Creating a butterfly garden:

Creating a garden to attract adult butterflies to your patio, deck or garden requires that you accommodate their needs. First pick a site in full sun—not less than six hours a day—and protected from wind, perhaps by a wall, fence or hedge. If you are using a container, choose one which is large enough to accommodate the root balls of several nectar producing plants.

Select nectar-producing plants with flowers that are yellow, orange, red, purple or pink, and are clustered or flat topped with short tubes from which the butterfly can drink with its

proboscis. Be certain to include a place for the butterfly to warm its wings nearby, a large flat rock or a plant with large leaves will do. Water from a nearby mud puddle or shallow dish is essential. Always remember to avoid using pesticides or herbicides as they will kill adult and larval butterflies.

Nectar Plants:

**ANNUALS:** ageratum, calibrachoa, cosmos, lantana, marigold, nasturtium, nicotiana, verbena, zinnia

**PERENNIALS:** bee balm, black-eyed Susan, butterfly weed, candytuft, catmint, chives, columbine, coreopsis, delphinium, dianthus, echinacea, liatris, lupine, phlox, salvia, sedum, Shasta daisy

**TREES and SHRUBS:** butterfly bush, low bush blueberry, viburnum, spirea, hibiscus, plum, redbud and pear trees

Encourage more butterflies: While you can attract butterflies to your garden by providing just a nectar source, you will attract many more by also having host plants in your garden. Host plants (such as violets, pansies, sunflowers, asters, butterfly weed, white turtlehead, fennel, clover, dill and parsley) may suffer chewed leaves, but are necessary for the growth cycle of butterflies. These hosts can be planted in your garden or in containers placed in less visible spots.

Selecting native plants is important for many of our native butterflies who cannot develop and survive on non-native species. Some butterflies only lay their eggs on specific plants. For example the monarch butterflies larvae only eat *Asclepias*, the milkweed plant. If you want to encourage specific butterflies you need to grow the particular plant they prefer. There are many books and web sites available that provide more information as you build your butterfly garden.

*The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is a non-profit organization whose mission is to share knowledge and experience with the public through outreach programs in education, horticulture and gardening; to provide the Master Gardener Training Program to interested members of the public; and to provide graduates of the Master Gardener Training Program with educational and practical opportunities to extend their knowledge and interests in gardening and related topics. <http://www.massmastergardeners.org/>*