

# SENIOR ADVOCATE

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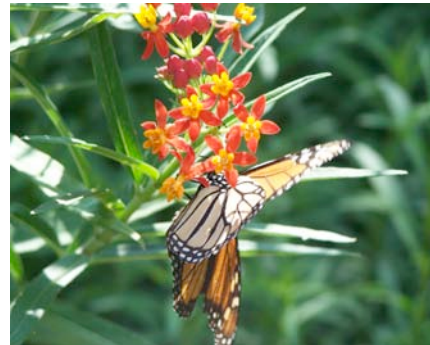
## In the Garden A Place for Butterflies

by Diana Hyland [photos by William Hyland]

Creating a butterfly garden is easy once you know what butterflies like. And what they like most is nectar, conveniently packaged within the flower of some of our most beloved and easy-to-grow plants. On most days butterflies stay busy prowling for meals, but once their supply is depleted they move on.

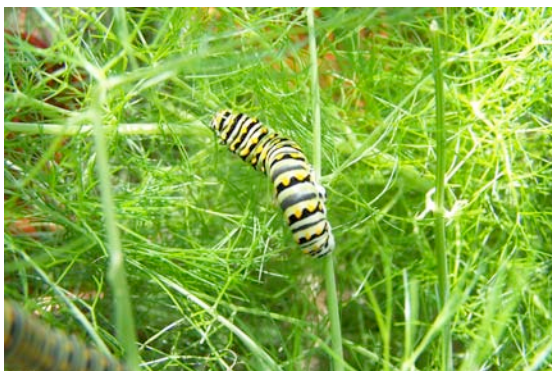
To attract a yard-full of fluttering butterflies, it's important to know which plants appeal to which butterflies. In Texas, start with butterfly weed, Texas gold columbine, lantana, big red sage, blackfoot daisies, black-eyed Susan's, purple coneflowers and Turk's cap, to name a few. These can be found at area garden centers. To keep butterflies around longer, you should select a variety of plants that bloom at different times.

The butterfly's sensor system is unique. It can see color in the ultraviolet range and smell using its antennae, which helps to guide it to certain food sources. Planting the butterfly's main food source in large groupings will make it easier for them to find their coveted nectar, as well as make it more likely they will stay.



Because a butterfly's mouth is shaped like a long straw-like tube, they survive on a strict liquid diet, consuming only nectar and water. To attract butterflies, some gardeners put out over-ripe fruit, as the sweet aroma travels fast. Once they arrive, you'll need to provide a steady food supply as well as a shallow pool of water to satiate their thirst.

In addition to eating, female butterflies spend a good amount of time looking for places to lay their eggs. They seek out host plants that will provide a good food source for their young, as once grown, caterpillars can eat up to 1000 times their weight in plants. Therefore, to attract butterflies you must also think about which plants provide the best diet for their offspring.



These pesky caterpillars eat different foods and have different mouth parts than their winged parents. Their strong jaw and enormous appetite means they can quickly defoliate a small plant.

In my garden, caterpillars love to chomp on fennel and parsley, so I grow abundant quantities that I gladly sacrifice knowing that these ravenous vegetarians will eventually transform into butterflies. Caterpillars are fussy eaters, so planting the right food source is

important. And if you do, they are less likely to devour other plants. If you don't like where they settle, pluck them off with a gloved hand and move them. And if you want to see butterflies, never use insecticides.

As Austin continues to grow, our natural habitats shrink. By creating a butterfly garden in your own backyard you are also doing a small part to keep the butterfly safe in our community. Once your garden is in place, make sure to plant an observation bench for quietly watching all the activity. The best time to see butterflies is on warm, sunny days, which are plentiful in these parts. Happy planting.

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### **Host plants for Caterpillars**

A well planned butterfly garden must provide sweet nectar for the adult butterfly as well as a generous food supply for caterpillars. Here are some examples.

<u>Type of Butterfly</u>	<u>Food Supply for Caterpillars</u>
Black Swallowtail	dill, parsley, anise, fennel, carrots
Monarch	milkweed
Queen	milkweed
Gulf Fritillary	passionflower vines
Texas Crescent	shrimp plant, ruellia, flame acanthus
Painted Lady	hollyhock, thistles
Viceroy	cottonwood, poplar, willow
Gray Hairstreak	Texas persimmon, winecup, butterfly weed



©2006 Diana Hyland is a freelance writer and plant lover. She serves on the executive board of the Austin Herb Society and chairs the annual Herb Fest at the Sunset Valley Farmers Market. You can reach her at 468-9125, or [hylandink@austin.rr.com](mailto:hylandink@austin.rr.com).