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## Building a butterfly garden

By Reina Newton Tefs

**Remember butterfly kisses when you were a kid? Your mom's eyelashes fluttering against your cheek as you giggled and imagined colorful wings tickling your skin. With a little care and attention, you can enjoy real butterflies in their own habitat easily created by you.**

Butterfly gardens can be any size from a window box to a landscaped garden complete with pond. In our area, it is not difficult to plant the variety of flowers that butterflies need to flourish through their life stages of eggs, caterpillars, pupas and adults.

Planting specific nectar-producing flowers will attract butterflies, but planting caterpillar host plants will give butterflies a place to lay their eggs and make them want to stay in your garden longer. Because butterflies cannot drink directly from open water, a salty water source that could be as simple as a bucket of moist sand or the damp sides of a birdbath would be sufficient. Since they are cold-blooded insects and need to raise their body temperatures in order to fly, place stones for them to bask on in a sunny area.

Butterflies are attracted to flowers by color. Plant patches of the same flowers because they are easier to find than single ones. It also is easier for them to extract nectar from single-flowering plants. Monarch butterflies like milkweeds, giant swallowtails prefer citrus and torchwood, palamedes swallowtails like red bay and sassafras, zebra longwings (Florida's state butterfly), julias and gulf fritillaries are attracted to passion vine, orange-barred sulphurs and cloudless sulphurs prefer wild sennas and clovers and the dainty sulphurs are attracted to asters.

Butterflies don't like roses, but flowering nectar sources with attractive blooms include buddleia, heliotrope, lantana, mint, pentas, porterweed, verbena and zinnias. Vary the plants, and a greater variety of butterfly species will be attracted to your garden. And be on the lookout for hummingbirds because they are attracted to many of the same flowers.

You probably won't want to make host plants the focal point of your garden, but butterflies won't care where you put them. Mom is just looking for that specific plant she instinctively knows will meet the nutritional requirements for her voracious babies who will be munching away until they go into the pupa or chrysalis stage. Plant several of each type of host plant if you have room. Host plants include butterflyweed, snakeroot, cassia and passion flower.

Nancy Olsen, a naturalist with Collier County Parks and Recreation said that butterflies do not bite, nor do they carry disease, and in their adult form, they do no harm. There are about 160 species of butterflies in Florida.

By growing plants that caterpillars like to eat and adult butterflies like to feed on, you can increase the number and variety of butterflies in your garden. Planting flowers with varying blooming cycles will keep your garden full of activity throughout the growing season. Planting shrubbery will protect them from wind and rain, but avoid the use of herbicides and insecticides.

In our area there are beautiful examples of butterfly gardens including Tigertail Beach and in Naples at Barefoot Beach Preserve County Park, Sugden Regional Park and Veterans Community Park in Naples.

"Bring Back the Butterflies" is a North American campaign to help people increase the numbers of butterflies in the continental United States and Canada. This effort was created to help reverse the ongoing destruction of local butterfly habitats caused by construction, pesticides and moth and mosquito spraying programs. Research has shown that planting host plants is more effective than just planting nectar-producing flowers because female butterflies are attracted from long distances to find specific plants for their eggs, and male butterflies are attracted to the females.

It takes one to two months for a butterfly to go from egg to adult. Many species live for two weeks, but some live only a day or two and others are capable of living for nine months. Although butterflies live only a short time, the pleasure they bring as you watch them flutter from flower to flower in your garden is worth the small price it takes to build a healthy habitat. Maybe you will even be "kissed" by a real butterfly.



The Butterfly Garden at Tigertail Beach attracts many butterflies including the zebra longwing. This butterfly feeds on nectar and pollen and can live up to several months.