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Butterflies for the Northwest Garden



Butterflies have captivated our imagination with their beauty but are otherwise poorly understood. Today, however, we are beginning to realize the many benefits of these smaller wildlife forms. Butterfly watching ranks high among our outdoor pleasures, right alongside enjoying birds and wildflowers.

1. **Design around sun, wind and water.** Choose a sunny site out of wind for your butterfly garden. The majority of butterflies worship the sun, using it to navigate and increase their body temperature, which is necessary for strong flight. Butterflies are active on sunny days and inactive on cloudy days. On cool days and in the morning, butterflies can be seen basking in the sunlight with their wings open to the sun to absorb heat. If there are no large stones or rocks near your butterfly garden area, you can place a few perpendicular to the morning sun to serve as basking sites.

Wet mud around ponds may already be a popular spot for butterflies to congregate. Damp patches in wet sand or soil are important to meet the butterfly's need for water, salts and trace minerals. One simple way to create such a place is to gouge out some soil in a frequently watered area where water can collect. Another approach is to sink a small pie plate into the ground. Then fill it almost to the top with wet sand. Remember to locate water sources in sunny areas but out of wind. Butterfly watering areas should be damp without standing water on the surface. To keep domestic cats from preying on butterflies, the watering spots should be in more open areas or have a low chicken wire fence around it.

2. **Plant nectar sources for adult butterflies.** Butterflies are very keen-sighted. Large groups of brightly colored plants are especially attractive to them. So are sweet, pungent, even acrid-smelling flowers. Plants with flower heads that contain small multiple florets and broad petals, like daises, make the best nectar sources and furnish butterflies with necessary landing pads where they can rest and sip nectar as well as pollinate the plants. However, some ornamental flowering plants have been grown to produce more petals and less nectar, so avoid really showy plants and select simple varieties and native plant species.

When you plant your butterfly garden, strive to have something blooming from early spring to late fall. Many annuals and perennials flower over a long period of time. Clump nectar sources together to increase their attractiveness to butterflies. Arrange the plants in stair-step fashion with the tallest plants in the back to take advantage of the sun.

3. **Furnish breeding and feeding grounds.** Caterpillars eat leaves and other plant parts. Usually the plants needed by caterpillars are very different plants than those that attract adults. Larval plants are sometimes not as attractive as the nectar plants used by adults, especially after their leaves have been chewed-up by hungry caterpillars. Accommodate larval plants in the back corner or other out-of-the-way part of your garden. Some common northwest butterflies and their preferred larval plants are listed in the chart on the next page.
4. **Use diversity not pesticides.** Many of the common pesticides used on lawns and gardens will kill butterflies. Even the "organic" bacillus thuringiensis commonly used to control larvae and tent caterpillars will kill all caterpillars – even the desirable butterfly larvae.

To attract butterflies, reduce or eliminate the use of pesticides in your yard. There are many other ways to control pests. Planting a diversity of plants, mechanical pest removal, encouraging beneficial insects and birds, and reducing use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides will all help reduce the numbers of pests in your yard.

Common Butterflies in the Northwest

Common Name	Range & Abundance	Larval Food Plants	Time of Flight
Woodland Skipper	widespread, common	grasses	July/August
Anise Swallowtail	local, common	cow parsnip, seaside angelica, water parsley, fennel, dill, lomatium	May/June & July Sept.
Western Tiger Swallowtail	widespread, common	poplars, willows, aspen, wild cherries	May/August
Pine White	widespread, fairly common	Douglas-fir, pines, hemlock	July/August
Cabbage Butterfly	widespread, very common	cabbage & mustard families	March/October
Mustard White	local, common	mustard family	April/September
Brown Elfin	local, common	lodgepole pine, white pine	April/May
Purplish Copper	local, edge of development, common	dock	May/July
Spring Azure	widespread, fairly common	spiraea, ocean spray, dogwood	April/June
Lorquin's Admiral	widespread, fairly common	spiraea, willows, poplars, aspen	June/July
Mourning Cloak	widespread, fairly common	willows, aspen	July/March
Satyr Comma	widespread, fairly common	stinging nettles	March/October
Plain Ringlet	local, common	grasses	April/July

Woodland Skipper

Small sized butterfly with the upper wing side orange & brown and the underside duller. Often holds forewing and hindwing at different angles.

Anise Swallowtail

Medium to large sized butterfly with yellow and black marks, the abdomen is mostly black.

Western Tiger Swallowtail

Large butterfly with yellow and black “tiger stripes”.

Pine White

Medium sized butterfly, males have white & black markings, females have cream and some orange outlines on underside of wing.

Cabbage Butterfly

Medium sized butterfly, female have two black spots on wing, and males have one.

Mustard White

Medium sized butterfly, similar to the Cabbage Butterfly but has pronounced dark veins.

Brown Elfin

Small butterfly, dark brown to orange-brown color.

Purplish Copper

Small butterfly, females have a pattern of orange and dark brown with orange zig-zag on hind wings, males have brown with brilliant purple iridescence when struck directly by the sun.

Spring Azure

Small butterfly, females are dull with black borders at outer wing edges & blue highlights, males are violet blue.

Lorquin's Admiral

Medium sized butterfly, black with broad white bands across wings and red wing tips.

Mourning Cloak

Large butterfly, dark, yellow to white wing margins

Satyr Comma (Satyr Anglewing)

Medium sized butterfly, tattered looking wings, golden-tawny with black blotches, looks like bark.

Plain Ringlet (Ochre Ringlet)

Small butterfly, varying shades of orange-yellow.