

Gardening for Butterflies

Butterfly Conservation Dorset Branch

2010



A Selection of Hints and Tips for a Butterfly Friendly Garden

General

Butterflies and moths need two things: nectar for the adults and plants for the caterpillars to eat.

There are some general rules to attract and keep not only butterflies but all sorts of wildlife in your garden:

Don't be too tidy

- Leaf litter is where some butterfly/moth chrysalises will be found
- Many "weeds" are superb for butterflies/moths
- The dark, dusty corners of your shed are where some butterflies will hibernate



Have a variety of plants and habitats if you can

- Flowers (preferably single not double flowers and must be in a sunny spot)
- Grass (native British grasses are the foodplant of many butterflies/moths)
- Trees and shrubs (Huge numbers of moth species use these to breed)
- A pond (not a prime habitat, but some moths breed on pond plants)



Go organic – pesticides and herbicides are one of the reasons our wildlife is declining

Nectar

There are a few general rules for good butterfly flowers:

Single, not double, flowers are more likely to have nectar, and the shape allows the butterfly to get at it



Old fashioned flowers tend to be best – modern ones have sometimes been developed for their looks and have lost their nectar



Some shapes are winners – daisy type flowers and scabious type flowers are usually good



Different butterflies go for different flowers/colours, so have a variety

Aim for a long season of flowers – Spring and Autumn can be a difficult time for early/late species

Moth attracting flowers have one thing in common – they bloom at night, and are usually highly scented to attract the moths

Plants to grow for nectar

Aubretia.

Good early nectar.

Sweet Rocket (*hesperis matronalis*).

Nectar and caterpillar foodplant for the Orange Tip and Green-veined White; evening scented, old-fashioned plant.



Perennial wallflower (*erysimum*).

The usual one you find is "Bowles Mauve". Flowers on and off all year.

Herbs.

Marjoram, mint and thyme especially.

Knautia Macedonica.

Small scabious flower – leave the seedheads for the birds.



Buddleia.

If you can fit in more than one, prune them at different times so they flower in turn.



Verbena bonariensis.

Superb for butterflies and flowers for months.



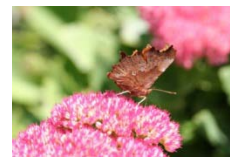
Valerian (*centranthus ruber*).

The plant you see in walls. Will flower for a long period if you take off the early seedheads.



Ice plant (*sedum spectabile*).

Pale pink and white are the best colours.



Michaelmas Daisy.

(and other asters).



Teasel.

Good nectar for butterflies and bees, then leave the seed heads for the Goldfinches. Tobacco plant, honeysuckle, evening primrose and night-scented stock for the moths.



Willow (*salix*).

A very important source of early nectar.

Foodplants

Native plants are best – butterflies and moths can't use exotic species.



"Wild" flowers are often favoured by butterflies and moths, but some can suit an ordinary garden – try bird's foot trefoil, primrose and red rose campion.

Nasturtiums are used by the Large and Small Whites, but whether this will keep them off your cabbages is debatable!



Moth plants include delphinium, sweet william, goldenrod and fuchsia

Ivy. Foodplant for the Holly Blue butterfly and good shelter for hibernating insects. Ivy is the key late nectar source (if you let it flower) for butterflies, and is also good for bees and hoverflies)



Grass – native British species is excellent – hundred of moth species and quite a few butterflies use them.