

Tips for Creating a Butterfly Garden Using Native Montana Plants

Montana Native Plant Society (mtnativeplants.org)

Locate your garden in a warm, sunny spot that is protected from wind to create the ideal conditions for butterflies.

- Choose a south-facing site that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight.
- Use trees and shrubs to diffuse wind. (Some species, like aspen and cottonwood, are also great for a variety of caterpillars.)
- Be sure to select plants that thrive in sunny conditions.

Provide shallow water sources that butterflies can use to take in water and minerals.

- A large-diameter dish, placed on the ground, containing wet sand can be used.
- Avoid using a birdbath since most butterflies will not use such a deep water source.

Incorporate the best plants to attract and support the common butterflies in your area. In general:

- Plant large groupings (five or more) of each type of flowering perennial – butterflies are more easily attracted to masses of flowers.
- Use different plants that flower at different times of the season so that your garden can always be a good source of nectar for butterflies.
- **Butterflies tend to be attracted to flat, disk-shaped flowers with abundant nectar.**

Common Name	Scientific Name	Mature Size	Bloom Time	Example of Msla. Co. Butterflies Attracted by Nectar
Sulphur buckwheat	Eriogonum umbellatum	8”h x 10”w	Late Spring	Coral hairstreak, Rocky Mountain spotted blue
Wallflower	Erysimum capitatum	24”h x 6”w	Late Spring	Pale swallowtail
Woolly groundsel	Senecio canus	6”h x 6”w	Late Spring/ Early Summer	many species
Shrubby cinquefoil	Diasphora fruticosa	48”h x 48”w	Late Spring/ Early Summer	Northwestern fritillary
Blanketflower	Gaillardia aristata	24”h x 18”w	Mid-Late Summer	Northwestern fritillary
Hairy golden aster	Heterotheca villosa	5”h x 18”w	Summer	Many species
Yellow evening primrose	Oenothera flava	6”h x 10”w	Summer	Hummingbird moth
Blazing star	Liatris punctata	24”h x 10”w	Summer	Painted lady
Goldenrod	Solidago missouriensis, S. rigida	36”h x spreading	Late Summer	Milbert’s tortoiseshell and more
Smooth blue aster	Aster laevis	24”h x spreading	Late Summer	Northern checkerspot and more
White prairie aster	Aster falcatus	18”h x 18”w	Late Summer	Northern checkerspot and more
Spotted Joe Pye weed	Eupatorium maculatum	48-72”h x 36”w	Late Summer	Painted lady
Rubber rabbitbrush	Ericameria nauseosa	30-50”h x 48”w	Late Summer	Juba skipper, northwestern fritillary

- **Provide plants for butterflies to lay their eggs upon and for caterpillars to eat.** Each butterfly species lays eggs only on the plants that will the caterpillars of that species. Include a variety of these host plants so that you can attract and support a variety of butterfly species.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Example of Msla. Co. Butterfly Caterpillars Using Plant as a Host
Silvery lupine	Lupinus argenteus	Persius duskywing, silvery blue
Woods’ rose	Rosa woodsii	Pale swallowtail, coral hairstreak
White evening primrose	Oenothera caesptitosa	Hummingbird moth
Sulphur buckwheat	Eriogonum umbellatum	Rocky Mountain dotted blue
Shrubby cinquefoil	Diasphora fruticosa	Purplish copper
Fireweed	Chaemerion angustifolium	Hummingbird moth
Rubber rabbitbrush	Ericamera nauseosa	Northern checkerspot
Canada wildrye grass	Elymus canadensis	Woodland skipper
Chokecherry	Prunus virginiana	Two-tailed swallowtail, western tiger swallowtail, coral hairstreak
Quaking aspen	Populus tremuloides	Mourning cloak, western tiger swallowtail
Goldenrod	Solidago missouriensis, S. rigida	Northern checkerspot

Sources for Creating a Butterfly Garden Using Native Montana Plants

Montana Native Plant Society (mtnativeplants.org)

What is a MT native plant?

- A plant that has grown in MT – without being brought to MT by people – for centuries.
- Find a plant, searching with its common or scientific name, at the **Montana Field Guides** website: fieldguide.mt.gov
- See the geographical distribution of a plant using the **USDA Plants** website: <https://plants.usda.gov/checklist.html>
- Beware the term “*native*” ...it is used by those who sell plants in different ways. “Native” often means that a plant is naturally-found in the U.S. (but not necessarily MT).

Why use MT native plants in your landscape?

- Pollinators have co-evolved with plants that are native to your area. Thus, they often require these plants to reproduce and live.
- By supporting pollinators with native plants, you will also support other wildlife (*e.g.* birds) and lessen the effects of habitat loss for such wildlife.
- The relationship between native plants and wildlife:
 - *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants* (2009), Douglas W. Tallamy, Timber Press
 - *Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants* (2014), Heather Holm, Pollination Press
- Montana Native Plant Society – landscaping resources and info (mtnativeplants.org/Native_Plant_Landscaping)

Where to purchase native plants in the Missoula area?

- **Blackfoot Native Plants** – growers of native trees, shrubs, grasses, herbaceous perennials (blackfootnativeplants.com)
- **Great Bear Natives** – growers of native trees, shrubs, grasses, herbaceous perennials (greatbearnativeplants.com)
- **Caras Nursery** – native plant section (carasnursery.com)
- **Ace Fancy Plants** – native plant section (montanafancyplants.com)
- **Native Ideals Seed Farm** – seeds for many different MT plant species, sold at retail outlets and online (nativeideals.com)

Where can I learn about and identify different pollinators in my yard?

- **BugGuide.net** – identification of all types of insects (send ‘em a photo!)
- **Butterflies & Moths of North America (BAMONA)** – including regional checklists & great photos (butterfliesandmoths.org)
- **Xerces Society** – conservation info and all things “bug” (xerces.org)
- **Missoula Insectarium** – local experts and hands-on bug experience (missoulabutterflyhouse.org)
- **Great ID book** – *Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants* (2014), Heather Holm, Pollination Press



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