

How to Attract More Colourful Butterflies to Your Garden

Most of us enjoy seeing butterflies around our garden. Their movement and bright colours add an extra dimension to any area. Sadly, the recent trend for weed-free, super tidy gardens has made life very difficult for our butterflies. This, coupled with the over-use of pesticides and herbicides, has greatly reduced their numbers. If you'd like to give the butterflies in your area a helping hand, try a few of the tips in this factsheet. Not only will you enhance the beauty of your garden, but you'll also be helping to conserve these beautiful insects for future generations.

1. What's on the Menu?

Adding plenty of nectar rich flowers to your garden will certainly enhance its beauty, and in the process it may attract a few butterflies, but if you choose your plants carefully you can attract a greater variety species to your garden from early spring right through to late autumn. Listed on the next page are some of the butterfly species seen in UK gardens along with their favourite foodplants. To encourage the butterflies



Buddleia - a butterfly magnet!



Common Blue Butterfly (*Polommatus icarus*)

to lay eggs in your garden you'll also want to provide foodplants for their caterpillars (see chart overleaf).



Peacock Butterfly (*Inachis io*)

2. Solar Power

Butterflies only fly when it's sunny. That's because they're solar powered. They need to warm up their bodies in the sun in order to generate enough energy to move about. You can provide them with a perfect solar power station by putting some rocks in a sunny, sheltered spot, safely out of the way of foot traffic. If you like to photograph butterflies this will be a great place to get your shots. Your flowers will also attract more butterflies if they're in a sunny position.

3. A Good Nights Sleep

To make sure your butterflies get a good nights sleep provide them with a place to roost each night. Some butterflies rest on the stems of flowers and grasses each night, but many feel safer higher off the ground. If you have space, grow some climbing plants like ivy or honeysuckle.

4. A Drinking Hole

When you've got a tongue as thin as a butterfly, getting a drink of water can be difficult. They can't just go to a pond and start slurping like other larger animals. Their tongue's are not strong enough to break through the surface of the water. The best way

to provide water for them is to have some wet mud somewhere in the garden where they can land safely and drink. This will also provide birds like house martins and nuthatches with nesting material. Dig a hole and then line it with a sheet of polythene. Put the soil back on top of the polythene, being careful to remove any sharp stones, and keep it very wet throughout the summer.

5. Hibernation Habitats

Butterflies need a place to hibernate in the winter. Some, like the Skippers, hibernate as caterpillars inside grass stems. If you wait until spring to mow the grass this will give them a chance to develop into adult butterflies.

It is possible to buy ready made "Butterfly Houses" which are specially designed for butterflies to hibernate in. In theory they should work, but while they look attractive we've yet to see one which was inhabited by anything other than spiders. Butterflies tend to seek out garden sheds and other out buildings where they can shelter from the wind and keep frost-free.

BUTTERFLY FACTS

- Butterflies appeared on earth more than 45 million years ago
- There are 56 Species of Butterfly in the U.K.
- Some species of butterfly feed on dung, sweat and urine
- Caterpillars can eat 20 times their weight a day in food
- If human babies grew as fast as caterpillars they would weigh around 8 tons within two weeks

6. Artificial Nectar

You may have seen adverts for something called "Butterfly Attractant". It's basically an artificial nectar, and you can make it yourself. Here's the recipe: 1 part sugar (fructose, not cane sugar), 4 parts water, add a few drops of Soy Sauce to the mixture to provide sodium and a few other nutrients. Boil for about 2 minutes then leave to cool. The mixture can be stored in a refrigerator.

Fructose, or fruit sugar, is used because - as all jam makers know - it doesn't re-crystallise. Cane sugar can re-crystallise inside the butterfly's body and kill them.

You'll need a special feeder to serve the mixture. Take an old jam jar lid. Cut a piece of yellow or red sponge into a circular shape to fit inside the jam lid. Pour the mixture onto the sponge. The butterflies land on the sponge and sip the nectar.

7. Butterflies of the Night

Not all moths are dull coloured creatures that eat your clothes. Many of our moths are as colourful as the butterflies and well worth attracting to your garden. Some are day-flying, but most come out at night. They can be attracted



Large Elephant Hawk-Moth
(*Deilephila elpenor*)

Photo: Steve Botham

Butterfly Species	Favourite Flower	Caterpillar Foodplant
Brimstone	Purple Loosestrife	Buckthorn
Comma	Devil's Bit Scabious	Hops or Nettles
Common Blue	Marjoram	Bird's Foot-Trefoil
Gatekeeper	Bramble	Fescue Grass
Green-Veined White	Sweet Rocket	Garlic Mustard
Holly Blue	Heather and Holly	Holly and Ivy
Large Skipper	Devil's Bit Scabious	Grasses (Cocksfoot)
Large White	Nasturtium	Nasturtium
Meadow Brown	Thistle	Meadow Grass
Orange Tip	Garlic Mustard	Ladies Smock
Painted Lady	Michaelmas Daisy	Thistle and Mallow
Peacock	Buddleia	Stinging Nettle
Red Admiral	Ivy	Stinging Nettle
Ringlet	Privet	Cocksfoot Grass
Small Blue	Kidney Vetch	Kidney Vetch
Small Copper	Michaelmas Daisy	Sorrel
Small Skipper	Fleabane/Thistle	Yorkshire Fog
Small Tortoiseshell	Michaelmas Daisy	Stinging Nettle
Small White	Lavender	Brassicac
Speckled Wood	Honeysuckle	Cocksfoot Grass

to your garden with night flowering plants like honeysuckle, night scented stocks, verbena, valerian, sweet rocket and evening primrose.

8. Keeping it Tidy

The caterpillars of commas, peacocks, red admirals and small tortoiseshell butterflies will all eat stinging nettles. Nettles are easy to grow but they will quickly spread around the garden. One way to keep them under control is to plant them in a large pot or bucket (with small drainage holes in the bottom) and bury it in the ground. This stops the roots spreading out and sending up new shoots in

different parts of the garden. Caterpillars prefer the tender new shoots at the top



Small Tortoiseshell Caterpillar

of each stem, so if you cut the nettles back in either mid-June or mid-July this will encourage fresh new shoots to grow and will encourage the butterflies to lay a second batch of eggs.

9. Organic is Best

Organic gardens always attract more wildlife. Chemical treatments for garden pests only provide a temporary solution. They are poisonous to natural pest controllers like ladybirds and lacewings, and they also kill butterflies and their young. If you want to see plenty of colourful butterflies in your garden, don't waste your money on chemical sprays. Keep it natural and organic.

ABOUT THIS FACTSHEET

This factsheet is one of a series written and published by UK Safari - a website for anyone interested in the wildlife and countryside of Britain. UK Safari also publish a free monthly nature newsletter. Visit: www.uksafari.com