Butterflies in your Garden

**About butterflies**

- Butterflies are some of the most beautiful and graceful of the pollinators.
- Butterflies collect pollen on their legs and body as they flit from flower to flower and are important pollinators for many native plant species.
- Butterflies are most common in summer and fall in our area.
- Butterflies require different food sources for the caterpillar and the adult life stages.

**About caterpillars**

- *Host plants* are the plant species a specific caterpillar will eat. Butterflies lay their eggs on these plants.
- Caterpillars, or larvae, are the immature (can’t reproduce) stage of a butterfly.
- They are “eating machines” and from egg hatch to adult metamorphosis that’s what they do, gobble the leaves of host plants.
- Butterfly larva can be picky eaters: some will eat only one species while others eat a broader variety of plants.
• After metamorphosis the beautiful adults visit flowers to gather nectar for energy, sipping the liquid with long straw-like mouthparts.
• Some butterflies are more picky about nectar sources than others.

Butterflies and host plants

Pipevine Swallowtail
Aristolochia californica
California pipevine

Gulf Fritillary
Passiflora species
Passionflower vine

Western Tiger Swallowtail
Fraxinus species
Ash tree

Mournful Dusky-Wing
Quercus species
Oak tree

Nectar plants for adult butterflies

Asclepias species
Milkweed

Lavandula x ginginsii
‘Goodwin Creek Gray’,
Goodwin Creek lavender

Buddleja davidii hybrids
Butterfly bush

Scabiosa atropurpurea
Pincushion flower

References


Ponder, Marissa V. How to Attract and Maintain Pollinators in Your Garden. ANR Publication 8498, October 2013.

Photo credits: Ellen Zagory (unless otherwise noted)