KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Butterfly Gardens”

March 30, 2021

Who doesn’t like butterflies? Would you like to attract them to your yard or garden? Butterflies aren’t just pretty; they are important pollinators for your flowers and veggies, and an important food source for birds.

You may be surprised to learn there are 20 species of butterflies and moths commonly found in the Pacific Northwest. Summer visitors to my garden are swallowtail, painted ladies, Monarch butterflies and hummingbird moths.

You too can create a habitat that supports them at all stages of their lives.

Here are eight considerations for a healthy butterfly-friendly garden:

1. Protection.
2. Nectar.
3. Fragrance.
4. Host plants.
5. Minerals and Water.
6. Basking and roosting sites.
7. Winter shelter.
8. Maintenance and understanding homeowners.
9. **Protection**: These insects can be buffeted by wind, so give them sunny site out of the wind. A windbreak can consist of a house, fence, trees and tall shrubs.
10. **Nectar Plants**: Include shrubs with pink or white flowers, such as viburnum, oceanspray and rhododendron. Hardy vines on a trellis or wall supply flowers such as Clematis and Honeysuckle. Nectar providing trees include Cottonwood, Cherry, Apple and Plum.
11. **Fragrant Plants:** Butterflies are near sighted, so they are attracted to fragrant flowers. These include lavender, lilac and honeysuckle.
12. **Host Plants:** Butterfly caterpillars require food to grow and develop into butterflies. The food source is plant leaves, and most require specific plants to meet their species’ nutritional needs. Planting host plants near the nectar plants enables them to live and reproduce for many generations. E.g. Monarch butterflies require milkweed for their larvae. Showy and Narrowleaf Milkweed are good choices in Central Oregon.
13. **Water:**  Butterflies need moisture, not deep water. A container or lid placed in a sunny spot into the ground, filled with clean sand and water to the top. Placing twigs or rocks on top gives butterflies a perch to land and sip. A little salt added in mid-summer gives them the minerals.
14. **Basking and Roosting sites**: Since butterflies are ectotherms, they need the sun to warm them in order to fly, and rarely fly below 60 degrees. They enjoy open, sunny spaces to bask, including large, flat rocks, brick, cement and gravel walkways. Much like chickens, they like to rest in the afternoon and evening, and enjoy a protected site to roost. They also roost during wet weather and cold spells under leaves and man-made structures.
15. **Winter shelter:** Butterflies can over-winter here as adults or in larval stages. They hibernate under leaf litter or mulch, in tree cavities, garden sheds and bird houses. A log pile is particularly helpful for butterflies, native bees and amphibians.
16. **Maintenance:** Learn to recognize butterfly larvae and expect they will eat the plant leaves. Do not use pesticides in your butterfly garden. Can’t you leave a small ‘wild’ spot in your yard year-round for these insects?

There are many butterfly friendly varieties of trees, shrubs and flowering plants for Central Oregon. Buy ones that are hardy for zone 5 or less. Chose a variety of plants to provide blooms throughout the year. See publication EC1549 on the OSU Extension website.

For more information on this or any other gardening topic, go to our website gocomga.com and click on the KPOV tab on the orange bar. This has been Gardening: Get Good at it on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

“The Wildlife Garden: Create a Butterfly Garden” OSU publication: <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/ec1549>