



Garden Tips

Growing Up Butterfly



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Would you like to attract more butterflies to your garden? Then you've got to feed the caterpillars.

While adult butterflies feed from many sources of nectar (like Echinacea and Buddleia), butterfly caterpillars are fussy and will only eat the leaves from specific plants, called *host plants*. Certain species, such as the Monarch, have a single host plant (Milkweed), while others will dine on several. The Black Swallowtail, for instance, will eat dill, parsley, fennel, and carrot.

Since they're tiny and can't travel to a new plant, caterpillars need to hatch on the kind of plant or leaf they want to eat. If the egg isn't placed on the correct plant, the caterpillar won't survive. (That's why the invasive Swallow-wort is so dangerous: the Monarch mistakes it for Milkweed, lays her eggs, and the caterpillars starve and die.)

Over its life, a caterpillar will increase in weight many thousands of times, so plant several hosts plants in a group and be prepared for heavy munching. If you don't want to see the plant damage, locate the host plants in a less-visible spot, but still a short distance from your butterfly nectar plants. It also helps to have a water source nearby and a place for the butterflies to sun themselves.

A note about pesticides: pesticides may harm both butterflies and caterpillars. This includes the use of the bacterial insecticide Bt (*Bacillus thuringienseis*) which can kill butterfly larvae.

Remember, if you want to attract butterflies, you need to provide plants attractive to both caterpillars and butterflies.

For more information:

<http://www.naba.org/> North American Butterfly Association. Information includes: ***Basics of Butterfly Gardening, Caterpillars and Host Plants, Regional Butterfly Garden Guides***

<http://www.thebutterflysite.com> Information includes: ***Butterfly Nectar Plants, Butterfly Host Plants, Butterfly Gardening***