

Attracting butterflies and moths to your garden

Butterflies and moths belong to the insect order *Lepidoptera*. They are well known for their beauty, but are maybe less well known for their role as pollinators for many plants and as a food source for certain animals. Worldwide, the presence or absence of butterflies and moths often used as an indicator of the health of the environment. Many people like to plant their garden to attract and provide a habitat for butterflies, and there are several things that can be done to attract these beautiful visitors to your garden. If you want to attract butterflies and other good insects to your garden, remember that there are always many more insects to be found in gardens that contain no pesticides. Pesticides kill both benign and pest insects. If you have enough of the benign insects in your garden, they will keep the numbers of pest species down without any pesticides.

Creating a suitable habitat

Planting food plants for larvae and adults is the best way to attract butterflies, but there are other things that can be done to provide a good habitat. Butterflies like warm sheltered places and rocks or bricks for pupation sites or for basking in the sun. Butterflies also like water a permanent drinking area for butterflies can be made by burying a bucket to the rim, filling it with sand or gravel, and then pouring in liquids such as stale beer, sweet drinks or water. However, sweet liquids can also be attractive to insects such as wasps that you **don't** want in the garden.

Planning a butterfly garden

Butterflies and moths require food plants for their caterpillar stages and nectar plants for their adult phase. All larvae feed on specific host plants. If you can, include both nectar and host food plants in your butterfly garden. Plants also provide protection from predators, shelter, a place to lay eggs and a place to attach their chrysalis. Try to plant a variety of plants so there are flowers available all season, and plant them in a north facing or sunny position in the garden, as butterflies need warmth. The best butterfly and moth gardens are a little wild! Butterflies prefer flowers with clusters of flowers because they are easier to land on, and planting several of the same species means that the butterflies get more food at each stop.

Suitable plants

Annual flowering plants that attract butterflies and moths include: common sunflower, cosmos, fetid marigold *Dyssodia papposa*, heliotrope (*Heliotropium arborescens*), lantana, marigold, nasturtium, petunia, salvia, scabiosa (*Scabiosa atropurpurea*), snapdragon, statice, verbena and zinnia. Herbs that attract butterflies and moths include; catnip, chives, dill, lavender, mint, parsley, and sweet fennel. Herbaceous perennials that attract butterflies include asters, beebalm, butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), chrysanthemum, clover, daylily, hollyhock, mallow, phlox, pinks, rudbeckia, sedum, shasta daisy and yarrow. Shrubs include the 'butterfly bush' or buddleia, cotoneaster, lilac, mock orange, privet, viburnum and spirea. Butterfly and moth larval host plants that are useful in New Zealand include the creeper muehlenbeckia, snow tussock, swanplant, nettles and wild cabbage. Some plants are listed as pest plants, notably cotoneaster and buddleia, so checking with local authorities before planting these species is advised.