

# How to create your own butterfly garden

## 1. What is a Butterfly Garden?

A butterfly garden is a space you can create that provides nectar and shelter for butterflies and other pollinating insects, as well as a place Monarch butterflies to lay their eggs. Gardens like these are important for the growth of the Monarch butterfly population and are a lovely space to enjoy as well. Because we need to cater to the butterflies and the caterpillars there are two parts to the garden; butterfly attracting and caterpillar nourishment.



## 2. How to Attract Butterflies to your Garden

### **What plants are best to use:**

Butterflies love bright colours so plant the right colours. Think red, yellow, orange, pink and purple nectar flowers. To attract Monarchs to your garden, you will need lots of wild flowers for the butterflies to feed off the nectar. Plant your swan plants close to your flowers so the butterflies can be near nectar plants, mixing them up, creating shelter for your caterpillars. You can buy cheap punnet's of flowers (that are great for butterfly gardens) at school fairs and garden centres. Once you have a nectar-rich garden, the monarchs will be sure to follow and feed, and lay eggs on your swan plants.

The following flowers are ideal ones to purchase or grow from seed in your garden, both for the monarchs and for yourself to enjoy. Cosmos, Sunflowers, Echinaceas, Rudbeckias, Zinneas and Azaleas are rich in nectar and are great to have in your garden. Buddleia bushes are butterflies' absolute favourite flower and they are attracted to Petunias too. I particularly recommend Marigold flowers, they are great to repel aphids and will help save your swan plants from being attacked by them. Spring flowers such as Verbena and Cineraria are vital for butterflies coming out of overwintering, hungry for nectar.

### **Garden Location:**

- Butterflies typically only feed in full sun so make sure you plant your nectar flowers in full sunshine. Also make sure this planting is sheltered from the wind
- Provide shelter. Butterflies, bees and other pollinators need shelter to hide from predators. Let a pile of grass cuttings or a log decompose in a sunny place on the ground. Allow a dead tree to stand to create nooks for butterflies and solitary bees.
- Even if you have a very small garden or courtyard you can still do your bit to attract the bees and butterflies by having one or two hanging baskets or a plant pot with a few nectar flowers in it.
- Butterflies are attracted to muddy puddles which they will flock to for salts and nutrients as well as water. Bees, birds and butterflies also all need water, so having a birdbath somewhere to catch the rain is a really good idea.

### 3. Caring for Caterpillars and Swan Plants

Swan plants, it's that simple and is vital for the Monarch population to breed. Plant the swan plants in a few areas in your garden, this will prevent disease spreading keep the aphids at bay. Plan ahead and make sure you have heaps of swan plants, so you never run out grow from seed indoors from September. If you buy small swan plants in Spring, put them to one side, and cover them up with onion bag or netting as these are far too small to go outside. Resist the temptation of exposing them to the Monarchs and letting them lay eggs on your plant. Let them grow bushy and taller before you use these plants during peak summer, you will be truly thankful you did when garden centres have run out. Once your swan plants have been striped by the caterpillars, keep on watering and feeding it. Sheep pellets are also good to sprinkle around the base of the plant this adds nitrogen to the soil and helps boost the leaves, making them grow back quicker, ready for the next generation of Monarchs to lay eggs on. In winter cover your plants with a frost cloth or keep them in a greenhouse if you are in colder part of the country. Another good idea is to place pea straw around the base to stop the roots from freezing. These ideas also work if your plant is the ground and it will grow into a massive bush if cared for correctly. Don't forget to water during winter months.

When you buy swan plants, make sure they are sturdy with plenty of leaves then wash all the leaves before giving them to your caterpillars just in case there's been some over spraying. You should have only a few eggs on each plant otherwise the plants will be striped of leaves very quickly by the hungry caterpillars. I would recommend a maximum of four or five eggs on an average sized swan plant to start with, then replacing your swan plant with another one just before the plant gets totally eaten. Don't handle caterpillars!!

### 4. Helpful Garden Hints

-Avoid insecticides because they kill insects. Go organic. Spraying toxic sprays disturbs the natural organisms in your soil, and risks disrupting the natural ecosystem of your garden

-Dedicate an area or patch of your lawn not to be cut and let the grass grow and sprinkle wild flower seeds. This will grow into a meadow and is great for the birds too. Plus, a garden patch of colours and flowers will be nicer on the eye. A pollinator paradise for sure!

-January is peak Monarch season, this is when the garden centres run out of swan plants every year. So, it's very important to have your own supply of plants ready for the influx of eggs and caterpillars. Plan ahead and grow from seed in September.

-Watering is best in the morning or evening, as during the day the water will just evaporate and burn the flowering leaves. Also, that way you are helping to conserve water.

By Maria Romero  
The Butterfly Musketeers

