

Sussex Wildlife Trust WG5

Gardening for Wildlife

Factsheet

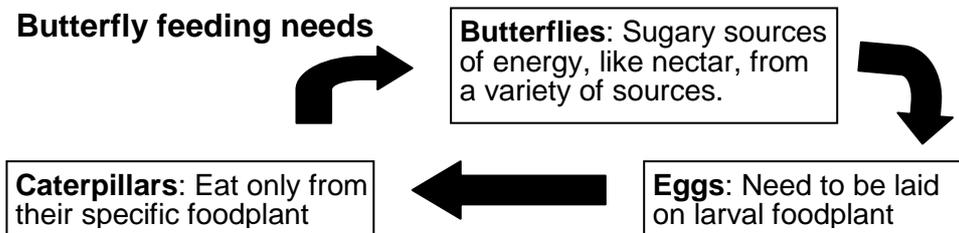


This is an introduction to attracting butterflies into your garden. If you would like more detailed information, please contact the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

Why attract butterflies?

If you take steps to encourage butterflies into your garden, you will end up with a double bonus: colourful butterflies, and a beautiful garden. You will also be helping to compensate for the loss of much butterfly habitat in the countryside. Many butterfly species have declined in number, and gardens can provide valuable alternative sites for feeding, and, with the right plants, for breeding.

Butterfly feeding needs



Nectar sources for butterflies

Butterflies can fly surprisingly long distances in their search for the right breeding site. Nectar provides essential sustenance in this phase. Butterflies locate nectar flowers by following scent and colour.

Generally, both native and non-native flowers are suitable as nectar sources for butterflies. What is important is that the nectar should be accessible – simple, shallow flowers are best. Butterflies **cannot** reach the nectar in deep flowers (e.g. foxgloves). You should also be wary of double flowers, as many of these are sterile, scentless, and do not have any nectar.

You can group flowers to create a 'butterfly border'. The ideal location for such a border is in a sheltered, sunny spot. When planning what to plant, it is important to ensure that there will be flowers in spring and autumn, as well as the summer. The following list is not comprehensive, but should be a helpful guide to seasonal nectar.

- **Spring.** Aubretia, bluebell, bugle, celandine, crocus, cuckooflower, daisy, forget-me-not, grape hyacinth, heather, hedge mustard, honesty, hyssop, primrose, pussy willow, red deadnettle, violet, yellow alyssum, yellow archangel.
- **Summer.** Many flowers, especially, bramble, Buddleia (butterfly bush), candytuft, dandelion, floss flower, golden rod, heliotrope, hemp agrimony, knapweed, lavender, marigolds, marjoram, mint, nasturtiums, oxeye daisy, purple loosestrife, scabious, sweet rocket, sweet william, teasel, thyme, toadflax, valerian and yarrow.

Butterflies

WildCall

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The Sussex Wildlife Trust manages 36 nature reserves and uses its knowledge and skills to help the people of Sussex enjoy, understand and care for wildlife and the places where it lives.

The Sussex Wildlife Trust is one of 47 trusts working to protect wildlife in town and country throughout the whole UK.

For more information on the work of the Sussex Wildlife Trust and how to become a member please contact:

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Registered charity
 No 207005

- **Autumn.** Black-eyed Susan, Buddleia (deadhead to prolong season), hebe, heliotrope, ice plant (but not 'autumn joy' or 'brilliant'), ivy, michaelmas daisy, scabious, tobacco plant and yarrow.

Butterflies will also feed on ripe and windfall fruit, root sap, tree trunks, honeydew, sweat, carrion, dung, cuckoo spit, and even wine! You could also put out sugar strips, or a shallow dish of sugared water and honey. If you live near the coast, this will be popular with migrants.

Persuading butterflies to breed in your garden

Butterfly caterpillars are very fussy about what plants they will eat. So you will need to provide the right host plants. It is very important that they have a pesticide-free environment, and it helps if the host plants are positioned in a sunny place.

The stinging nettle will attract five colourful species of butterfly (see table). Stinging nettles need nutrient-rich soil and should be cut back in June or July, to stimulate new shoots to grow, providing more food for caterpillars. Check there are no caterpillars on the stems you remove. Growing flowers in an existing nettle bed is a simple way to create a butterfly border.

You can encourage even more species by having a butterfly meadow. You will get most variety by having three different lengths of grass.

- Very short turf, with bird's foot trefoil.
- Shortish turf with thyme, cuckoo flower, clovers and primrose.
- A summer meadow, with a mix of long, medium and short grasses, and knapweeds, oxeye daisy, marigolds, scabious and clover. Cut the meadow twice a year to 5 cm, in June and the autumn. Leave the cuttings for two days, then rake them up. Leave some areas uncut, and vary the mown and unmown sections in different years.

Host Plants	Butterfly species
Stinging nettle, hop, thistles	Red admiral, small tortoiseshell, painted lady, comma, peacock.
Grasses: e.g. timothy, cock's foot, Yorkshire fog, common fox tail	Skippers, browns, marbled white, speckled wood
Restharrow, vetch, clovers, bird's foot trefoil	Common blue, clouded yellow, green hairstreak
Honesty, hedge mustard, cuckoo flower	Green-veined and other whites, orange tip
Docks, knotgrass, sorrel	Small copper
Holly (female, with berries) and ivy	Holly blue
Purging and alder buckthorns	Brimstone

Overwintering sites

Some species of butterfly will hibernate during the winter months to emerge in the spring. Species such as small tortoiseshells, commas, peacock, brimstone and some red admirals overwinter as adults, while several blues and browns survive in chrysalis form. Those butterflies that overwinter in the UK need shelter, either natural or manmade. They need somewhere cool and dry, for example garden sheds, outhouses or garages. Wooden fences (made with untreated wood) are useful, as are wall crevices. For natural shelter, ivy and woodpiles are ideal.

Leaving some areas of long grass and seedheads will give essential sites for grass-feeding butterflies.

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