



# A Bounty of Butterflies

By Rebecca Krawczyk

I have recently been labelled a selfish gardener. After progressing from initial grief at the hurt, through abhorring the idea, to being rather angry, I am now very close to accepting and embracing this statement. Especially since I can't deny it.

As soon as the frost is out, I drop everything and run off to my gardens. I leave my family standing there mouths agape (but with meals in the pantry!) watching my back as I hustle down the trails as fast as my galoshes will allow. For me, everything else pales in comparison to tossing earthworms, taking stock, and preparing everything for summer's all too short symphony of colour.

I may be on the verge of a gardening addiction. I know I've lost all restraint: I just *love* dirt. I immerse myself up to my elbows in sticky, sweet muck. Despite the kerchief, it still gets in my hair and smeared across my forehead and I proudly flaunt it, going to pick up more garden supplies in my lovely, dirty state.



Selfishness? Addiction? Could be either. There's no denying there's a lot of self-gratification in gardening. You get outside, breathe fresh air, move your muscles, burn calories and it's a great way to relieve stress — just take it out on the weeds! There are other rewards, too — lavender sachets, choke cherry jelly on toast, fresh oregano sprinkled on spaghetti — if this is selfishness, I don't want to stop.

But maybe I can manage some justification. The greatest joy of gardening is how it allows us to commune with nature. Watching flowers sway in the breeze can lull the mind into meditation. Working with the earth and plants brings life-long learning. Observing any garden up close reveals amazing wildlife and plant interactions that might otherwise go unnoticed.

But here's my best argument of all — creating and maintaining a garden is actually generous. Your family and neighbours benefit, of course, from the beauty, but purchasing, reproducing and caring for plants is a form of conservation, too. No matter how small the space, a garden is a cradle for species diversity — and diversity within an ecosystem is one way scientists measure environmental health. Every plant introduced to a garden creates a new little ecosystem, or home space, capable of providing food, shelter and meeting places where a myriad of wildlife can eat, sleep, bask in the sun, and socialize. Now I ask you, how could the host of an environmental oasis for hundreds, or even thousands, of creatures be selfish? I'm prepared to argue those who spend the most time in the garden are giving as much as they get. Or ideally they are. I am an organic gardener, blending indigenous plants capable of interacting with their natural surroundings and favourite cultivars; it's great for the environment and

great for gardeners, too. When a garden is left to function organically, with diligent tending by the human hand, it is as capable as a chemically maintained garden of producing a vast palette of colours and tastes. True, I do it because I love it, but I am doing good, too.

Is it more work to garden organically? Perhaps, but the rewards can be enormous. Let me tell you about one of them: when we work with Mother Nature we give homes, watering holes and a bounty of food to the most unobtrusive, beautiful and serene garden guests imaginable. In return, the guests pollinate our plants and bring genetic diversity to our space. With their bright colours and hints of iridescence, they will provide an unmatched display of glitzy yet tranquil entertainment throughout the spring and summer. Ladies and gentlemen, let's get to know the glittery, flittery, none-too-jittery, rarely bashful butterfly.

To get started, we must understand for whom we are gardening, the order *Lepidoptera*, butterflies — and some moths — so here are some facts about these pretty critters:

**Butterflies love basking in the sun.**

Like reptiles, they are cold-blooded and depend on the sun's rays to warm them throughout the day. In our climate, they are naturally most active at and after noon when the sun is at its warmest. Most butterfly-friendly plant species, such as wild berries, do best in full sun, so choosing plants for the butterfly garden is really as easy as eating raspberry pie. Just look for the full sun symbol.

**Butterflies don't like wind.** They are a relaxed bunch of insects but delicate so they don't like to struggle while eating. Butterfly gardens should be in areas sheltered from prevailing winds, such as by walls, hedges, fences or the forest's edge.



**Butterflies like to drink water.** Our winged visitors need to wash down their sweet meals with sips of the best thirst quencher around: fresh water. It doesn't take much, but they like it best where moisture is constantly dripping — like under the eavestrough, or in very shallow pools. Biologists know butterflies, particularly males, gather in large groups around puddles in saline soils. Sprinkling a tiny dash of salt on your water source and replenishing it after heavy rainfalls may bring a wider variety of butterfly species to the garden.

**Butterflies prefer a diverse buffet of nectar.** Creating a garden with a smorgasbord of shape, scent and colour will attract butterflies in more shapes, sizes and colours to enjoy, but importing exotic plant varieties does not encourage native butterfly populations. It is best to include as many indigenous species as possible if you want to attract butterflies and increase their population. In turn, they'll improve the diversity of the surrounding environment. As you plan your garden, include plants to provide a progression of blooms so butterflies can enjoy the garden for the entirety of the warm season.

**Many butterflies have short proboscises (tongues).** There are only a few species that can reach the nectar in very long, narrow, tubular flowers. Choose brightly coloured flowers that openly invite winged wildlife to drink their nectar and distribute their pollen. If deep tubular flowers are your favourites, you can take comfort in the fact that hummingbirds have long, strong tongues and will never turn their beaks up when offered the beauty of a bell.

**Butterflies lay their eggs on plant species their caterpillars eat.** Like all

parents, they only want the best when it comes to their kids, and butterflies can be very picky. If there's a butterfly you'd like to see, you need to know what their offspring likes to eat (the chart below gives details). The larvae will eat, grow and attach their chrysalis on or around their favourite food. These plants will be nibbled, but it is a symbiotic relationship. The plant can handle the loss; some pruning by larvae makes the root system hardier.

**Butterflies cannot tolerate pesticides of any kind.** If there is any pesticide use near your garden — even in roadside ditches — caterpillar offspring have a good chance of ingesting the poison, with death a likely result. All pesticides, chemical, biological, or genetically modified, affect more than just their target. The bacterial pesticide Btk (*Bacillus thuringiensis kurstaki*), for example, is a “biological technique” for controlling cabbage white, gypsy moth and tent caterpillars, but it attacks all butterfly and moth caterpillars. Research has shown that drifting pollen from Btk-modified corn can harm butterfly larvae in nearby, untreated plants. Use only organic pest control if you want butterfly visitors.

### **Simple Steps to Hosting Butterflies**

Think of your favourite plants and colours, then use the lists below to help you choose which should be on a menu to appeal to butterflies.

Sketch where the plants will go in your garden.

Protect the natural environment by buying nursery-grown stock.

Plant your selections in plenty of rich soil in cool, rainy weather, spend a bit of time tending to them — and watch for a never-ending nature show where any day can bring a new and interesting visitor!



## A BUTTERFLY BUFFET LAKE OF BAYS STYLE

### NATIVE TREES

<i>Acer rubrum</i>	Red Maple M
<i>Acer saccharum</i>	Sugar Maple
<i>Betula alleghaniensis</i>	Yellow Birch <sup>F</sup>
<i>Betula papyrifera</i>	White Birch
<i>Populus balsamifera</i>	Balsam Poplar
<i>Populus grandidentata</i>	Large-toothed Aspen
<i>Populus tremuloides</i>	Trembling Aspen
<i>Prunus serotina</i>	Black Cherry
<i>Salix nigra</i>	Black Willow <sup>M</sup>
<i>Tilia Americana</i>	Basswood

### NATIVE OR NATURALIZED\* PERENNIALS

<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Common Yarrow <sup>!</sup>
<i>Apocynum androsaemifolium</i>	Spreading Dogbane <sup>!</sup>
<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>	Wild Columbine
<i>Articum minus</i>	Common Burdock <sup>*</sup>
<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	Swamp Milkweed <sup>M</sup>
<i>Asclepias serotina</i>	Common Milkweed <sup>!</sup>
<i>Aster azureus</i>	Sky Blue Aster
<i>Aster laevis</i>	Smooth Aster
<i>Aster novae-angliae</i>	New England Aster
<i>Aster puniceus</i>	Purple-stemmed Aster
<i>Chelone glabra</i>	Turtlehead <sup>M</sup>
<i>Chrysanthemum leucanthemum</i>	Ox-eye Daisy <sup>!</sup>
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Bull Thistle <sup>*</sup>
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Queen Anne's Lace <sup>!</sup>
<i>Clematis virginiana</i>	Virgin's Bower <sup>M</sup>
<i>Echium vulgare</i>	Viper's Bugloss <sup>!</sup>
<i>Eupatorium maculatum</i>	Spotted Joe-Pye Weed <sup>M</sup>
<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>	Boneset <sup>M</sup>
<i>Geranium maculatum</i>	Wild Geranium <sup>F</sup>
<i>Geranium robertianum</i>	Herb Robert <sup>F</sup>
<i>Heracleum lanatum</i>	Cow Parsnip <sup>M</sup>
<i>Hesperis matronalis</i>	Dame's Rocket <sup>!</sup>
<i>Hieracium aurantiacum</i>	Orange Hawkweed <sup>*</sup>
<i>Hieracium caespitosum</i>	Yellow Hawkweed <sup>*</sup>
<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	St. Johnswort <sup>!</sup>
<i>Ledum groenlandicum</i>	Labrador Tea <sup>M</sup>
<i>Leontodon Taraxacum</i>	Dandelion <sup>*</sup>
<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	Cardinal Flower <sup>M</sup>
<i>Malva moeschata</i>	Musk Mallow <sup>*</sup>
<i>Mentha Canadensis</i>	Wild Mint <sup>M</sup>
<i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	Black-eyed Susan <sup>*</sup>
<i>Silphium perfoliatum</i>	Cup Plant <sup>M</sup>
<i>Solidago spp.</i>	Goldenrods
<i>Sisyrinchium angustifolium</i>	Blue-eyed Grass
<i>Thalictrum dioicum</i>	Early Meadow Rue <sup>F</sup>
<i>Thalictrum polygamum</i>	Fall Meadow Rue <sup>M</sup>
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover <sup>*</sup>
<i>Verbena hastata</i>	Blue Vervain <sup>M</sup>
<i>Viola spp.</i>	Wild Violets <sup>F</sup>

### NATIVE OR NATURALIZED\* SHRUBS

<i>Crataegus spp.</i>	Hawthorns
<i>Lonicera tatarica</i>	Tartarian Honeysuckle <sup>*</sup>
<i>Myrica gale</i>	Sweet Gale <sup>M</sup>
<i>Prunus nigra</i>	Canada Plum
<i>Prunus pennsylvanica</i>	Pin Cherry
<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	Choke Cherry
<i>Rubus allegheniensis</i>	Black Raspberry
<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	Wild Red Raspberry <sup>!</sup>
<i>Salix spp.</i>	Willows <sup>M</sup>
<i>Sambucus Canadensis</i>	Black-berried Elder <sup>M</sup>
<i>Sambucus pubens</i>	Red-berried Elder
<i>Spiraea spp.</i>	Meadowsweets <sup>M</sup>
<i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	Common Lilac <sup>*</sup>
<i>Vaccinium angustifolium</i>	Low Sweet Blueberry
<i>Vaccinium macrocarpon</i>	Large Cranberry <sup>M</sup>
<i>Viburnum alternifolia</i>	Hobblebush <sup>F</sup>
<i>Viburnum trilobum</i>	High Bush Cranberry <sup>F</sup>

### NATIVE PERENNIALS FROM ONTARIO & CANADA

<i>Agastache foeniculum</i>	Giant Hyssop
<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>	Big Bluestem Grass
<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Butterflyweed
<i>Aster ericoides</i>	Heath Aster
<i>Astragalus Canadensis</i>	Canada Milk Vetch
<i>Cimicifuga racemosa</i>	Black Snakeroot
<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	Purple Coneflower
<i>Elymus Canadensis</i>	Canada Wild Rye Grass
<i>Helianthus strumosus</i>	Pale Wood Sunflower <sup>F</sup>
<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>	Ox-eye Sunflower
<i>Lepidandra virginica</i>	Culver's Root <sup>M,F</sup>
<i>Liatris aspera</i>	Rough Blazing Star
<i>Lupinus perennis</i>	Wild Lupine
<i>Monarda fistulosa</i>	Wild Bergamot
<i>Penstemon digitalis</i>	Foxglove Beardtongue
<i>Physostegia virginiana</i>	Obedient Plant <sup>M</sup>
<i>Pycnanthemum virginiana</i>	Virginia Mountain Mint <sup>M</sup>
<i>Tradescantia virginiana</i>	Spiderwort <sup>F</sup>
<i>Veronica noveboracensis</i>	New York Ironweed <sup>M</sup>

### ANTIQUEN ANNUALS & PERENNIALS

<i>Alcea rosea</i>	Hollyhock
<i>Borago officinalis</i>	Borage
<i>Centaurea spp.</i>	Cornflowers
<i>Echinops ritro</i>	Globe Thistle
<i>Eryngium spp.</i>	Seahollys
<i>Lavendula angustifolia</i>	Lavendar
<i>Malva sylvestris</i>	Common Mallow
<i>Origanum spp.</i>	Oreganos
<i>Passiflora incarnate</i>	American
<i>Passionflower</i>	
<i>Thymus spp.</i>	Thymes
<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>	Valerian

\* Naturalized species have been introduced from Europe and have thrived for centuries in our Zone 4b climate

M Moisture loving plants for moist sites such as depressions, riverbanks, shorelines and waterfront buffers

F Forest's edge

! Will spread quickly if allowed





So what can be expected after so much thoughtful preparation? The table is set and the nursery decorated, but when will the guests arrive? Butterflies generally require temperatures to be above 16 C to emerge from hibernation or migrate from their exotic winter residences to summer in Muskoka. Once they're here, some butterflies keep rigid itineraries and visit the same flower at the same time every day.

When they do finally land in your garden, what is the best way to enjoy them? Some garden hosts pull out a field guide and look them up — *Butterflies of Algonquin Provincial Park* by Gard W. Otis is an excellent reference for Lake of Bays gardeners. Some dutifully record species and their numbers for the Fourth of July count of the North American Butterfly Association. My mother would say there is no better way to educate a child about nature's life cycles than to observe the pupae's metamorphosis from an earth-bound larva into a hovering gem. To watch as it emerges, damp and wrinkled, it is almost too much to bear. Waiting once more, for just a little longer, as its wings and body harden in the warmth of the sun before it can take its first flight is a lesson in patience for hurried adults as well.

When you have your own butterfly garden, you'll understand: it's selfishness, it's an addiction, and it's generous, all at the same time. When the afternoons are too hot to work, I sit back and relax in my hammock, enjoy the beauty and revel in the fact that I have contributed towards one of the most colourful and complex shows on Earth: a butterfly garden.

#### **Recommended Reading:**

Opler, P. A. and Malikue, V. 1992. *A Field Guide to Eastern Butterflies*. Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston.

Otis, G.W. *Butterflies of Algonquin Provincial Park*. 1994. The Friends of Algonquin Park. Whitney.

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