



Merchandising Butterfly Gardens

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Butterfly gardens have become big business. The concept of butterfly gardens is compatible with many other trends in landscaping: children's gardening, natural gardening, low-chemical gardening, native plant gardening, annual and perennial flower gardening, and of course gardening for wildlife. Butterfly gardening also appeals to people who have learned of the degradation of butterfly habitats throughout the world, and want to contribute to the solution of that problem.

If you sell annuals, perennials, herbs or flowering shrubs, you can increase your sales by promoting these plants for use in butterfly gardens. Here are the steps toward a successful butterfly gardening marketing program.

Step 1: Become knowledgeable about butterflies. Learn everything you can about butterflies and butterfly gardening. Become THE source of information. Anyone can display plants with a sign that says "good for butterflies," but not everyone can answer customers' questions. Here are a few common questions that your customers might ask, along with some answers to get you started:

-Which butterflies are common in Indiana? Several groups of butterflies frequent the Midwest from spring through fall. The Sulphurs are brightly colored medium-sized butterflies that frequent open areas, meadows and roadsides. Both the Orange Sulphur and the Clouded Sulphur are common. As

caterpillars, they feed on alfalfa, clover, vetch and trefoil. As adults, they seek nectar from many common garden flowers, including annuals such as tithonia, pincushion flower, marigold, scarlet sage and zinnia. They also seek nectar from perennials such as phlox, asters, globe thistle, gayfeather and sedum. Among wild plants, adults drink nectar from clover, milkweed, goldenrod, dandelion, knapweed, dame's rocket and leadwort.

Eastern Tiger Swallowtails and Eastern Black Swallowtails, common to Indiana, are large butterflies characterized by narrow, elongate "swallowtails" at the back of their rear wings. They frequent woodlands, gardens and river valleys. As caterpillars, they chew on leaves of cherry, aspen, birch, lilac, willow, ash, hornbeam and tulip tree. As adults, they take nectar from annuals like lantana, from perennials like beebalm, phlox, butterflybush and hibiscus, and from flowering shrubs like lilac, honeysuckle, buttonbush and sweet pepperbush. They also feed on wild plants such as thistles, ironweed and milkweed.

The Pearl Crescent, the most common butterfly in the East, darts out toward passing objects. Their medium-orange wings have black markings and a black band at the edges. Pearl Crescents frequent flower gardens, fields, meadows and open wetlands, where their caterpillars feed heavily on aster foliage. The adults feed on flowers of asters like zinnia and tickseed, and on perennials such as aster, fleabane

daisy, black-eyed Susan, milkweed, clover and coreopsis.

Eastern Tailed Blue and the Spring Azure are both beautiful, small blue butterflies, among the first of the butterflies to appear in spring. Both frequent old fields. Eastern Tailed Blue caterpillars eat leaves of sweet clover, vetch and alfalfa; the adults eat nectar of milkweed, clover, wild strawberry, zinnia and wild geranium. Spring Azure caterpillars eat leaves of dogwood, blueberry, viburnums, cherry, sumac and privet; the adults feed on nectar of dogwood, holly, blackberry, milkweed, dandelion, lilac, rock cress, cherry, violet and cotoneaster.

Everyone is familiar with the Monarch and Viceroy butterflies. The Monarch, a migratory insect, frequents open areas, even in urban areas. Its caterpillars feed on several members of the milkweed family, and in its adult form it feeds on flowers of milkweed, butterflybush, aster, goldenrod, joe-pye weed, gayfeather, cosmos, lantana, scarlet sage, lilac, mallow, sedum, dogbane, pentas and zinnia. The Viceroy, which "mimics" the Monarch with its orange-and-black colors, is seen at edges of woodlands, marshes, streams and meadows. Larvae feed on willow, aspen, poplar, apple, plum and cherry leaves. Adults take nectar from goldenrod, joe-pye weed, thistles, milkweed, catmint and phlox. Viceroy adults also feed on rotting fruit, sap and bird droppings.

-Which plants attract the most butterflies? Butterflies feed primarily on leaves as caterpillars. When they mature, they feed on flower nectar. By planting a succession of flowers in a garden, and by tolerating a certain amount of foliar feeding, most gardens can

sustain a certain number of butterflies. By planting choice food sources (see the preferences of specific butterflies in the descriptions above), any gardener can increase the attractiveness of an area to a given species of butterfly.

Table 1 lists several common nectar sources and larval forage plants, which are also common plants at garden centers. By clearly labeling display of these plants as butterfly-attracters, your customers will be able to plant an effective butterfly garden.

-What can I do to increase the number of butterflies in my garden? Butterfly gardening is easy! Plant annual and perennial flowers, shrubs and trees that flower in succession throughout the season, to provide a steady diet of nectar. Provide at least some full sun areas, as butterflies require high light for proper development. Site flower beds out of direct wind. Provide water in the form of a shallow pond, pool, birdbath or puddles. Rethink your approach to pest management; try nonchemical methods, and remember that some of the feeding damage you see on leaves is probably caused by caterpillars (immature butterflies).

Step 2: Develop a high-quality product line. Market not only plants, but also hard goods and artwork related to butterflies.

Step 3: Promote your knowledge, image and products. Let people know you are the source of information and products related to butterfly gardening, and that you can provide products, assistance and information. The promotion ideas seem endless: host a butterfly lecture by a local entomologist; sponsor a children's butterfly coloring

contest; give your time, plants and financial support to a local public butterfly garden; speak about butterfly gardening to a school group or host a school group tour to your garden center or nursery; develop a butterfly display garden.

Step 4: Display your products effectively. Your sales area should let people know they are in the right place if they are interested in butterfly gardening. Use simple but professional-quality signs to let people know that plants in a certain display attract butterflies. Make bigger-than-life butterflies out of laminated paper backed with thin styrofoam, suspend them on sticks and insert them into the plants in your butterfly collection display (these could be the butterflies created by children in your coloring contest?). Provide information sheets to customers, about butterflies (a little editing of this article would do the trick). Display your butterfly plants near your displays of children's garden plants, herbs, native plants, and other compatible garden products.

Step 5: Provide personalized service that includes education. Remember that butterfly gardening is based on knowledge of a relationship between animals and plants. Teaching your customers will encourage a deeper involvement on their part. Help customers not only pick out the right plants for their butterfly gardens, but also teach them (through seminars, handouts and conversation) about the relationships between plants and butterflies.

Step 6: Enjoy! Remember that butterfly gardening is a pleasure. Helping your customers become involved in this great hobby should be equally enjoyable.

Table 1. Butterfly nectar sources and caterpillar forage plants

Annuals that serve as nectar sources:

Ageratum, *Ageratum houstonianum*
 Snapdragon, *Antirrhinum majus*
 Butterflyweed, *Asclepias curassavica*
 Tickseed, *Coreopsis tinctoria*
 Yellow Cosmos, *Cosmos sulphureus*
 Pink Cosmos, *Cosmos bipinnatus*
 Blanketflower, *Gaillardia pulchella*
 Globe amaranth, *Gomphrena globosa*
 Sunflower, *Helianthus annuus*
 Heliotrope, *Heliotropium arborescens*
 Lantana, *Lantana camara*
 Lobelia, *Lobelia erinus*
 Sweet Alyssum, *Lobularia maritima*
 Flowering tobacco, *Nicotiana glauca*
 Petunia, *Petunia x hybrida*
 Blue salvia, *Salvia farinacea*
 Red salvia, *Salvia splendens*
 French marigold, *Tagetes patula*
 Verbena, *Verbena x hybrida*
 Zinnia, *Zinnia elegans*

Early summer perennials that serve as nectar sources:

Flowering onions, *Allium spp.*
 Pinks and Sweet Williams, *Dianthus spp.*
 Dame's-rocket, *Hesperis matronalis*
 Perennial candytuft, *Iberis sempervirens*
 Lupine, *Lupinus polyphyllus*
 Lychnis, *Lychnis spp.*
 Catmint, *Nepeta x fassenii*

Midsummer perennials that serve as nectar sources:

Hollyhock, *Alcea rosea*
 Milkweeds, *Asclepias spp.*
 Coreopsis, *Coreopsis spp.*
 Lavender, *Lavandula angustifolia*
 Beebalm, *Monarda didyma*

Late summer perennials that serve as nectar sources:

Aster, *Aster spp.*
 Butterflybush, *Buddleia davidii*
 Purple coneflower, *Echinacea purpurea*
 Helen's flower, *Helenium autumnale*
 Gayfeather, *Liatris spicata*
 Summer phlox, *Phlox paniculata*
 Yellow coneflower, *Rudbeckia spp.*
 Showy stonecrop, *Sedum spectabile*
 Goldenrod, *Solidago spp.*