

## Butterfly Gardening

By Master Gardener Gail Elmore

One of the most pleasurable aspects of gardening is attracting birds and butterflies to your yard. For butterflies to become more than just occasional visitors, you can encourage their presence with your plant selections. Butterflies like nectar flowers with a large flat blossom like Coreopsis or Coneflower, or with a cluster blossom like Lantana or Verbena. Little tiny butterflies like Frog Fruit. To have blossoms to attract butterflies all summer and fall you can select plants with various bloom cycles or select plants with long bloom cycles like salvia greggii (Autumn Sage) or native Lantanas (L. camara or L. horrida). And, of course, butterflies are insects, so using insecticides is discouraged; insecticides don't know the difference between a good bug and a bad bug.

One thing that really increased the butterfly visitors was when I included larval plants in my landscape. But a word of caution, when the caterpillars come, their only job is to eat the host plant and become a butterfly! So decide what butterflies you want to supply a 'nursery' for and select plants accordingly. You may want to place them at the back of a flower bed where other plants can camouflage them when they become unsightly. Swallowtail butterflies like to lay their eggs on fennel, dill and parsley; I suggest planting several plants because the caterpillars can take one to the ground quickly! Both Monarch and Queen butterflies are attracted to Butterfly Weed for nectar and for a plant to lay eggs on. Gulf Fritillary butterflies lay their eggs on Passion Vine and it's also a nectar plant.

There's an excellent website for the North American Butterfly Association at [www.naba.org](http://www.naba.org) Go to Butterfly Gardening, then Regional Garden Guides, and click on the dot for North Central Texas. They have information for our region on nectar plants, larval plants and butterflies.

Butterfly gardening can be habit forming! I've been known to carefully move caterpillars from one larval plant that was overwhelmed by caterpillars to another that only had a few. And when I discovered that a cardinal (another backyard treasure) had found a caterpillar source, I had to let nature take its course and hope that it left a few to become butterflies!

If you would like to have a Master Gardener come speak to your organization, please contact Fred Hall at 716-8610.

Please email your gardening questions to [wichitamg@gmail.com](mailto:wichitamg@gmail.com) and don't forget to visit our website, [overthegardengate.org](http://overthegardengate.org). Now get out and garden!