

RHS recommended plants for attracting butterflies into the garden

ANNUAL AND BIENNIALS

African marigold (*Tagetes erecta*); ageratum (*Ageratum houstonianum*); alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*); candytuft (*Iberis amara*); China aster (*Callistephus chinensis*); cornflower (*Centaurea cyanus*); French marigold (*Tagetes patula*); heliotrope/cherry pie (*Heliotropium* cultivars); honesty (*Lunaria annua*); marigold (*Calendula officinalis*); mignonette (*Reseda odorata*); stocks (*Matthiola incana* and hybrids); sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*); verbena (*Verbena rigida*); wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*); zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*).

HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS

Alyssum (*Aurinia saxatilis*); *Agastache foeniculum*; arabis (*Arabis alpina* subsp. *caucasica*); *Asperula hexaphylla*; *Astrantia major*; aubrieta (*Aubrieta deltoidea*); blanket flower (*Gaillardia* cultivars); bugbane (*Actaea simplex*); catmint (*Nepeta* × *faassenii*); *Centaurea* spp. e.g. *C. dealbata*, *C. montana*, *C. macrocephala*; dahlias - single flowered types; elephant's ears (*Bergenias* spp.); *Eryngium* spp.; garden mint (*Mentha spicata*); globe artichoke (*Cynara cardunculus*); globe thistles (*Echinops* spp.); golden rod (*Solidago* spp.); hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis*); ice plant (*Sedum spectabile* - dark red cultivars are less attractive); Jacob's ladder (*Polemonium caeruleum*); *Liatris spicata*; Michaelmas daisies (*Aster novae-angliae*, *A. amellus*); perennial candytuft (*Iberis sempervirens*); phlox (*Phlox paniculata*); red valerian (*Centranthus ruber*); scabious (*Scabiosa* spp.); soapwort (*Saponaria* spp., especially *S. ocymoides*); sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*); thrift (*Armeria* spp.); *Verbena bonariensis*.

SHRUBS

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*); butterfly bush (*Buddleja davidii*, also *B. globosa*, *B. alternifolia*); caryopteris (*Caryopteris* × *clandonensis*); cherry laurel* (*Prunus laurocerasus*); *Escallonia* hybrids; firethorn (*Pyracantha* cultivars); hawthorn* (*Crataegus monogyna*); heather (*Calluna vulgaris*); heaths (*Erica* spp., *Daboecia cantabrica*); *Hebe* spp.; ivy* (*Hedera helix*); lavender (*Lavandula* spp.); Oregon grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*); privet* (*Ligustrum* spp.); willows (*Salix* spp., especially male forms of *Salix caprea*); *Spiraea japonica*; thyme (*Thymus* spp.).

*These will not flower as young plants and flowering is inhibited by severe pruning, such as clipping to make a formal hedge.

BRITISH WILD PLANTS AND FLOWERS

Angelica (*Angelica sylvestris*); bugle (*Ajuga reptans*); buttercups (*Ranunculus* spp.); clovers (*Trifolium* spp.); dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*); fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*); garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*); hawkweeds (*Hieracium* spp.); hemp agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*); hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*); knapweeds (*Centaurea* spp.); lady's smock (*Cardamine pratensis*); marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*); purple loosestrife

(*Lythrum salicaria*); willows (*Salix* spp., especially male forms of *Salix caprea*); scabious (*Knautia arvensis* and *Succisa pratensis*); stonecrop (*Sedum acre*); teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*); thistles (*Cirsium* spp. and *Carduus* spp.); valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*); water mint (*Mentha aquatica*).

LARVAL FOOD PLANTS

The flowers listed above will attract the more common and mobile species of adult butterfly but most are unsuitable as food plants for the larvae. The caterpillars eat leaves and often have a narrow range of suitable host plants. With the exception of the ubiquitous cabbage white butterflies, the larval food plants are often wild plants. Not all butterflies will lay eggs and breed in gardens, even if the appropriate food plants are provided. Some butterflies, such as the fritillaries, need woodland conditions that cannot be created elsewhere.

The following plants will provide food for the larvae of those species that might breed in gardens, although some butterflies tend to fly in restricted areas and will not readily colonise a new suitable habitat unless it is very close to existing butterfly colonies.

Stinging nettles: Used by Peacock, Red Admiral, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell. Needs to be grown in a sunny position to encourage egg laying. Prevent seeding by cutting down in mid summer after the first brood of the small tortoiseshell has developed.

Thistles: Painted Lady lays eggs on plants such as wetland thistle and creeping thistle.

Cabbages, other brassicas and nasturtiums: Large Cabbage White and Small Cabbage White.

Garlic mustard and lady's smock: Orange-Tip and Green-Veined White.

Mixed grasses: Various meadow grasses are used by Speckled Wood, Wall butterfly, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Ringlet, Small Heath, Large Skipper, Small Skipper and Essex Skipper. The habitat requirements of these butterflies vary, particularly regarding the types of grass, the height of the sward and whether it is dry or damp grassland. Generally the grass should be left uncut during the growing season and scythed in the spring, leaving a good basal growth on the tussocks.

Holly and ivy Holly Blue lays eggs on holly flowers in spring and on ivy flowers in late summer.

Alder buckthorn and purging buckthorn Brimstone butterfly.

Birdsfoot trefoil Common Blue.

Docks and sorrels Small Copper.