

# Butterfly Days

Article & Photo By Linda Roe

The days of August may be referred to as the dog days of summer, but I like to think of them as the butterfly days. Maybe it's because so many nectar rich butterfly attracting plants are in bloom. Maybe it's because there are more lazy days to sit and notice the garden happenings.

Butterflies are present of course, spring through fall. The tiny Silvery Blue butterfly is the first to appear in spring, even in cold, wet weather. The male is a bright blue, the female more brown. If you planted lupine, you should see this butterfly. Lupine is its caterpillar food. More commonly seen in urban areas, the Spring Azure butterfly is also blue. The larval food plants of this small butterfly include many common landscape plants.



Red Admiral Butterfly on Autumn Joy Sedum

As the weather gets warmer, more butterflies begin to show themselves. The most common butterfly, the Cabbage White, is a butterfly with a bad rap. Often seen flying around vegetable gardens, it gets the blame for damage done to crops by the Cabbage Looper, the caterpillar of a moth. In large numbers, the cabbage white can be damaging, but it can be a welcome sight to those who live in large urban areas and see no other butterflies.

The showiest of butterflies has got to be the Western Tiger Swallowtail. This big yellow butterfly with black stripes charms every garden it flutters into. It appears in June looking for lilacs and hangs around a full flower garden until September. The caterpillar is big and green with two large eyespots on its head. Look for it on big leaf maple, willow and cottonwoods.

Summer is the time to wander about the garden and look for three medium-sized, brightly colored orange and black butterflies. Red Admiral butterflies (pictured) are black with white bands and rusty red wing bars. In their caterpillar stage they feed exclusively on nettles. Many a butterfly gardener has actually planted a clump of nettles to draw these beautiful butterflies, myself included! Painted Ladies are not so picky in choosing their larval food. They feed on thistles, nettles and many members of the mallow (hollyhock) family. They are red-orange and black, with black, blue and white spots and are fairly common in gardens. Lorquins Admiral, our third O&B butterfly, is black with white bars and orange wing tips. If you live near a greenbelt with some native shrubs, you most likely will see this one. In addition to nectar, this butterfly feeds on rotting fruit and animal droppings.

Soon the days will get shorter, and the flowers of autumn will come into full glory. Asters, sedums and Black-eyed Susan will draw the attention of the little orange and brown skippers. These cute little butterflies are unique and easy to spot at rest, forewings and hind wings are held at different angles. They particularly like the Autumn Joy sedum in my garden. Leave a patch of your yard unmowed — grasses are their larval food.

Attracting butterflies to your garden is easy, just grow flowers! Butterflies prefer the single old fashioned type of flowers, since they are more nectar rich. Perennials with large flower clusters are good bets also. Flowers that are flat such as daisies and yarrow provide good landing sites for a nectar sip. If you plant an herb garden watch for butterfly visitors; herb flowers are fragrant and rich in nectar. If the only garden you can have is a container on your condo deck, try sweet alyssum, heliotrope, and petunias. Surely a cabbage white will stop by!

Butterfly gardens are a lazy gardener's perfect theme garden; an old weed patch will attract more butterflies than a meticulously tended clipped hedge yard. Gardening for butterflies means making a commitment not to spray pesticides. Even the so-called organic pest controls are made to kill insects, which includes butterflies. You will have a few chewed leaves, but as you encourage butterflies notice what else happens. More birds, more bees, more beneficial insects, soon you will have a little patch of wild in your own backyard!

One final note: get a good field guide to ID your 'flying flowers'. I recommend *The Guide to Butterflies of Oregon and Washington* by William Neill.