

Great Spangled Fritillary on Butterfly Weed
(*Asclepius tuberosa*)



CREATING A BUTTERFLY FRIENDLY HABITAT IN YOUR GARDEN

Beautiful and iconic, butterflies are a mainstay in the summer garden bringing delight and hope filled anticipation to the appreciative homeowner. Unfortunately, as habitats decrease and pesticide use accelerates, the continued survival of these magnificent creatures is in jeopardy. Creating a butterfly-friendly garden is a relatively straight forward process and can go a long way to ensure the survival of these beloved insects for years to come. Winter into early spring is the ideal time to design and plant your butterfly habitat to reap the rewards of a butterfly-filled garden come late summer.

From egg to larvae to chrysalis to adult — the entire lifecycle of the butterfly takes approximately one month to complete. Yet each stage is distinct and crucial to the life of the butterfly, requiring specific

plant material and habitat to transition successfully.

Incorporating host plants into the garden is vital for the butterfly to reach maturity. Monarch butterflies feed exclusively on all species of *Asclepias*, which also serves as a nectar food source for all adult butterflies. Both Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), with its bright orange or yellow flower clusters, and Swamp Milkweed, (*Asclepias incarnata*), sporting pink or purple flower heads, are highly ornamental as well as functional. Equally important, Monarchs will only lay their eggs on *Asclepias* plants. Likewise, yellow-flowering Partridge Pea is a preferred host plant for the golden Cloudless Sulfur butterfly.

The larva stage of the equally stunning Swallowtail butterfly, prevalent throughout



Spicebush Swallowtail on Verbena

New Jersey, also requires a strict and highly specialized diet for development and survival. Parsley, dill, and fennel are primary food sources of the developing Swallowtail. When planting these herbs in your vegetable garden, try adding a few to your landscape to supplement the diet of these lovely butterflies. These herbs and ornamental *Asclepias* are available in season at *Reynolds Landscaping*.

Monarch and Swallowtail butterflies are distinctive in the caterpillar stage — both sporting colorful striping on 2 to 3-inch frames. Banding coloration of the Monarchs is black, yellow, and white while those of the Swallowtail are white, green and black. It is advisable to memorize the markings of these beautiful butterflies in the caterpillar stage to avoid accidentally destroying them as punishment for munching on your plants.

The larva stage is complete when the caterpillar becomes a chrysalis — the pupa state — generally lasting from eight to twenty days depending upon species. The chrysalis, at inception, is typically apple or

jade green although a Monarch chrysalis also sports yellow spots. As the butterfly development nears completion, the chrysalis changes to a brown, desiccated color becoming translucent in the final stages revealing the colorful butterfly inside.

When the new butterfly emerges from its shell, nectar-producing plants are needed in the garden to feed these hungry young beauties. Besides milkweed, nectar-filled shrubs, and perennials that butterflies find particularly appealing include the Butterfly Bush, Joe Pye Weed, Autumn Joy sedum, Ironweed, Aster, Seaside goldenrod, Monarda, Phlox and Yarrow. Annual flowers sure to attract butterflies to your garden include Zinnia, Verbena, Salvia, Cosmos, and Marigold. Instead of turf grass, consider planting your lawn with red clover — the butterflies will thank you ten times over.

Beside incorporating host plants (i.e., *Asclepias* species) and colorful nectar filled flowering material into your garden, the following guidelines should be followed to create a successful

butterfly habitat. They include:

- A shallow water bowl or water feature with exposed rocks allowing butterfly to hydrate and rest.
- Shelter from wind and other adverse environmental elements in the form of a planting barrier or human-made structure.
- Avoid over weeding, allowing several common weeds such as clover and dandelions to exist in the yard. They provide a nectar source for butterflies and encourage the laying of eggs.

Avoid pesticides in the garden. They are a major factor in the decline of butterflies and other beneficial insects. —*Elaine Sisko, Reynolds Landscaping*



If you are interested in creating a butterfly garden visit *Reynolds Landscaping* located at 201 East Bay Avenue in Manahawkin for a comprehensive selection of nectar-producing and butterfly-attracting host plants. Seasonal availability of some plants will apply.



Monarch Caterpillar on Coneflowers



Monarch Chrysalis



Butterfly Weed (*Asclepius tuberosa*)