

SCENIC ROOTS

A BUTTERFLY GARDEN IN PARRY SOUND?

It's possible with the right ingredients

Nothing completes the beauty of a garden more than a visit by the Canadian Tiger Swallowtail. Butterflies provide the ultimate final touch. The Monarch is well known to most, but there are many equally attractive large butterflies in our area that come to flowers as well. Excellent new field guides are available to identify them. If they are feeding on flowers, or basking in the sun, they often allow close approach, even to within inches, when a look with the naked eye will reveal all the pattern and colour detail. While not necessary, there are new binoculars that focus as close as three feet, which are great for butterflies as well as birds. Over 80 different species of butterflies live in our area and use local wildflowers as nectar sources for the adults, and food for the caterpillars. So it is possible, here in Parry Sound, that with the right plants and other ingredients in the garden, they will visit.

Butterflies will fly long distances searching for nectar sources. Almost every garden will have the occasional visit. They may stop to investigate the Pansies, Petunias, and Impatients, but after a brief check, will move on. Annuals that produce blooms all season long are usually not the best nectar sources. The challenge is finding the right offerings that attract butterflies from afar and entice them to stay to feed. There are countless publications on butterfly gardening, all recommending various plants. Many grow best in southern climates and may or may not work here in Parry Sound. The grand champion in more southern areas is Butterfly Bush (Buddleia), but it's a challenge to grow and keep alive in our climate. It needs lots of sun and warmth in summer, and protection over the winter. Other garden plants often recommended for butterfly gardens, and which may work here, are: Lilac, Bergamot, Bee Balm, Marigold, Zinnia, Purple Coneflower, and Daisy. New varieties of garden plants appear all the time and some are going to be better nectar sources than others, so experimentation is necessary. Usually larger beds, rather than isolated plants, are best.

Story and Photos
by
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Try the proven winners, wildflowers. Since butterflies normally use plants growing in the wild, it is logical that they will be good additions to a butterfly garden. Some are exotic plants, originally from other lands and now established in the wild here, but most are native species. Blend them in with the other garden plants, or create a wildflower garden of our local specialties. Turn that sunny lawn area into a butterfly meadow, enjoy the colourful blooms, and watch the butterflies come. If you have a low soggy area on your property, some of the best butterfly plants will thrive there. Included is a glossary of select wildflowers frequently used by our local butterflies.

Sun is an important ingredient, the more the better. A south-facing garden, with sun all day, is best. Flowers produce more nectar on warm sunny days. Butterflies are cold-blooded creatures and need to warm up each day in order to fly, which is usually in the heat of the day from late morning until late afternoon. Shelter created by buildings, shrubs, or trees around the garden can block the wind and help the heat to build up. Buildings on the north side can effectively reflect sunlight onto plants. Butterflies often alight on a larger leaf or a warm rock surface and open their wings flat to bask in direct sunlight, so rocks or stone surfaces should be included in your garden.

Most local butterflies are non-migrants, spending the winter as eggs, caterpillars, or pupae. When warm weather arrives, the life cycle continues until eventually the adults emerge from the pupae. They spend a while pumping fluid into their wings, and then fly off. Butterfly enthusiasts say they are "on the wing". Throughout their short life, on average only a few weeks, the adults – while



- a) Viceroy - Uncommon (oft mistaken for a Monarch)
- b) Black Swallowtail - Rare this far North
- c) Red Admiral - Erratic, this summer may be good
- d) Leonard's Skipper - One of the last of the season
- e) White Admiral - Common, early summer