

NATURE

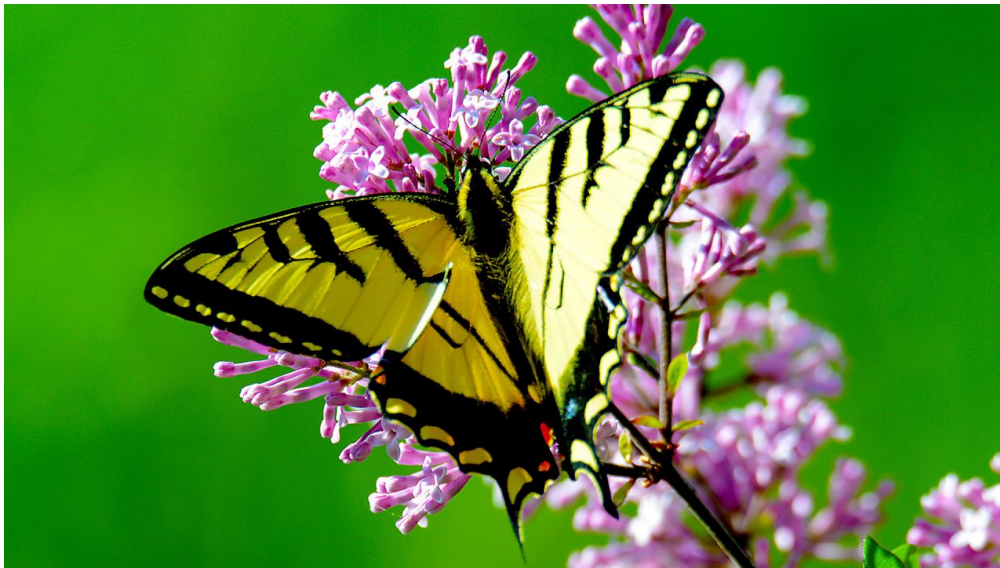
# Nature**NOW**

American Spring LIVE: Episode 1 - Birth and Rebirth

## How to Garden for Butterfly Life Cycles

April 23, 2019 | Susan M. Brackney | @SusanBrackney

Want to encourage more butterflies in your backyard or garden? Consider planting in concert with the lifecycle of butterflies in your region!



### **Add 'Host' Plants for a More Dazzling—and Diverse!—Butterfly Garden**

Avid butterfly gardeners typically know their way around a bed of coneflowers, zinnias, bee balm, and cosmos. After all, those nectar-rich plants and countless others like them provide many adult

butterflies with much-needed fuel. But, to truly thrive, butterflies need more than just nectar. To attract—and maintain—the attention of multiple species long-term, you need to provide resources for each stage of a butterfly’s life cycle.

The basic butterfly begins as an egg which hatches into a tiny caterpillar. Eating and growing steadily, the caterpillar periodically sheds its skin until it’s ready to form a cocoon-like structure called a chrysalis. Eventually, the adult butterfly emerges from its chrysalis. (When this final, magical step takes place depends on the type of butterfly and time of year, among other factors.)



Photo by Susan Brackney

### **Matchmaker, Matchmaker**

When it’s time to lay their eggs, specific butterflies often are drawn to very specific plants. And, once any eggs they’ve laid hatch, the resulting caterpillars will feed entirely on these “host” plants.

That's why, if there are certain butterflies you'd like to support, knowing which host plants they may prefer is paramount.

Perhaps the most well-known butterfly-and-plant relationship is that of monarchs and milkweed. Adult female monarchs will lay their eggs on [many different types of milkweed](#), and, if you really want to help these iconic creatures, you'll plant as much of the stuff as possible.

Want to see more viceroys? The caterpillars of these famous monarch-lookalikes survive well on fruit trees like apple, cherry, and plum as well as willow, poplar, and aspen.



Swallowtail butterfly | Photo by Susan Brackney

## Swallowtails

Luring super-showy swallowtails to the butterfly garden is fairly simple and rewarding. For instance, black swallowtails love fennel. (They may also go for parsley and dill in a pinch.)

Tulip trees and spicebushes are some suitable hosts for eastern swallowtails. For its part, the spicebush swallowtail prefers, yes, spicebushes, but sassafras trees will work, too.

And the pipevine swallowtail? They lay their eggs on, you guessed it, pipevine plants. ([The North American Butterfly Association \(NABA\)](#) offers details about several native pipevine species you might consider.)

Tiger swallowtails aren't quite as finicky. Their caterpillars may feed on several kinds of trees including aspen, tulip, and willow. They also like spicebushes and lilacs.

## Fritillaries and More

If you live in the southern states, you can grow passionflower to give the gulf fritillary caterpillar plenty to eat. Meanwhile, its more wide-ranging relative, the great spangled fritillary, prefers violets to host its young.

Want to help propagate painted ladies? They'll lay their eggs on many kinds of mallows and hollyhocks.

There are many more butterflies—and moths!—with host plant preferences. To see which species are most common in your area, check out these [regional butterfly garden guides](#).

## The Finishing Touch

Besides offering the right host and nectar plants for egg-laying butterflies, you can also provide them with essential minerals. Simply fill a saucer with small stones and sand that you keep moist. The insects will sip from these sandy puddles to get the dietary extras they need.

AMERICAN SPRING LIVE BUTTERFLIES BUTTERFLY GARDENING

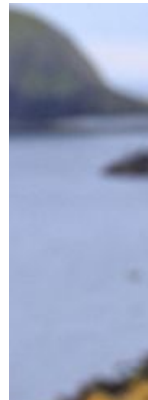
Susan M. Brackney | [@SusanBrackney](#) 

Susan M. Brackney is a Master Naturalist and author of four nonfiction books including *Plan Bee: Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Hardest-Working Creatures on the Planet*.

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