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GARDEN NOTES

LURING BUTTERFLIES TO YOUR GARDEN

By Dennis Hinkamp

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While those giant plastic butterflies people stick on their houses are nifty, real butterflies are even better additions to your landscape.

Butterflies can be lured into the garden by incorporating plants they prefer into the landscape, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. Butterflies are attracted to plants either for their nectar, or as a host plant where they can lay their eggs and the larvae can feed later. Once the larvae eat their fill they pupate and eventually emerge as wonderful butterflies.

"Most butterflies like blooming perennials, which are always a nice addition to any landscape," Goodspeed suggests. "A few of my favorite butterfly-attracting perennials include liatris, aster, coreopsis, scabiosa, sedum, joe-pye weed and blanket flower. A couple of shrubs such as butterfly bushes (appropriately named) and lilacs, are also nice additions to a butterfly garden. If there is room, throw in a honeysuckle vine. These plants all add color and beauty to the landscape on their own, then create even more splendor in the garden by inviting the marvelous butterfly."

There are a number of butterflies roaming the Intermountain area, Goodspeed says. The most common include the mourning cloak, clouded sulfur, silver spotted skipper, red admiral, swallowtail, gray hairstreak, spring azure, painted lady and the famous monarch. Most of them just flutter through the yard, but many will stop and spend some time if there are plants they seek.

Butterflies do not like strong winds because it is so difficult for them to fly and they get worn out, he says. If you live in a windy location, provide them with some form of protection such as a wall or tall hedge.

"A few of these charming insects also need a place to drink," he adds. "They seem to like mud puddles best. If you have a child or two, mud puddles are probably already a part of the backyard; but, if they aren't, create one with a small saucer or bowl.

"The one problem with butterflies is their immature or larval stage," he says. "The larval stage, or caterpillar, is typically the insect most gardeners try to keep out of the garden. They usually have a voracious appetite and devour plants like they were lunch, which they are. So, in order to develop a butterfly garden, some plants may need to be sacrificed. Enjoying the charm of

these lovely critters helps ease the pain of watching their 'teenage' larvae eat a few of your flowers and plants. Besides, it's a great way to get the children out into the garden, even if it is just to watch the insects."

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