



10 Steps to a Butterfly Garden

Butterfly gardening can be as simple or as complex as you wish. It may include native or exotic plants or a combination of both, and can range from a full backyard to a single plant – you just have to choose the right plant.

Australia has approximately 400 species of native butterflies, with most occurring in tropical and subtropical areas. There are about 24 species of butterfly that are commonly seen in the Melbourne area. They are more active on warm days in spring, summer and autumn.

There are four stages to the life cycle of butterflies: eggs, caterpillars (larva), pupa (chrysalis) and adults. The life cycle includes only two stages that actively feed. These are caterpillars and butterflies.

- 1. Provide nectar plants.** Adult butterflies feed almost exclusively on nectar from flowers. Having obtained all the protein they need while caterpillars, they now require only the sugar in nectar for energy. Excellent flowering plants include Everlasting Daisy (*Bracteantha bracteata*), Cut Leaf Daisy (*Brachyscome multifida*), Ageratum (*Ageratum houstonianum*), Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*), Rice Flower (*Pimelea* spp) and Daisy Bushes (*Olearia* spp).
- 2. Provide host plants** on which female butterflies will lay eggs. Most butterfly species will lay eggs only on specific host plants. These must be provided if you want butterflies to stay in your garden. If you provide some informal and relatively undisturbed areas in your garden, butterflies will be encouraged to breed. Most Australian caterpillars are small, shy and nocturnal leaving no evidence of their presence in your garden. Victorian butterfly attracting plant species include: Paper Daisies (*Helichrysum* spp) for Painted Ladies; Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*) for Eastern Ringed Xenicas and Common Browns; Mountain Pepper (*Smannia lanceolata*) for Macleay's Swallowtails; Sword Grasses (*Sthonia* spp) for Sword Grass Brown Butterflies; Lemon tree (*Trus limon*) for Orchard Butterflies and Dainty Swallowtails.
- 3. Include both native and exotic plants**, depending on the design of your garden. The two can be mixed together, such as the inclusion of butterfly plants in a vegetable garden. Keep in mind that although certain species of caterpillars feed on exotic plants, the vast majority require native plants as hosts.
- 4. Do not use any insecticides** and severely restrict the use of herbicides. Pest insects are not generally a significant problem in suburban gardens and can usually be managed with insecticidal soaps, removal by hand or with water, or by the predatory insects already present in your garden. All caterpillars eat leaves, so there will be some leaf chewing in your garden. Generally this is not noticeable, and when it is, the damage is not significant. Moth caterpillars and other insects may damage plants in suburban gardens, but butterfly caterpillars seldom cause any obvious damage. The only one that causes any real problem is the caterpillar of the introduced Cabbage White Butterfly.

A few other things to keep in mind

- ☞ Native butterflies, although mostly unprotected by law, are part of the natural scheme of things and deserve every consideration
- ☞ many introduced plants are weeds, some of them noxious, and these should not be planted;
- ☞ the butterfly garden isn't restricted to your backyard. The front yard, the local school and local parks can also be turned over to butterfly habitats.



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5. **Choose the right type of flowers**, particularly:
 - brightly coloured flowers, especially yellow, purple, orange and red. Butterflies also find pastel colours attractive;
 - shallow-throated flowers, as butterflies cannot reach the nectar in deep-throated flowers. Clusters of short, tubular flowers or flat-topped blossoms are best;
 - flowers that are open in design, such as daisies, not double flowers such as roses.
6. **Include a range of plants** that will in turn flower throughout spring and summer, and even into autumn. For blooms in your garden throughout the year, Azaleas will flower in spring, Sweetbriars in summer and Chrysanthemums in autumn.
7. **Choose plants that produce large masses of flowers.** Although butterflies are initially attracted to flowers by their colour, groups of flowers are easier to find than single blooms. The most effective way to lure butterflies is to construct a 'nectar trap'; an area of the garden so packed with flowers that butterflies are reluctant to leave because of the abundance of nectar.
8. **Include a range of plant sizes** to cater for butterflies that fly at various heights. Different species of butterflies will fly around grasses, ground covers, shrubs or mature trees. Woodwhites and Imperial Whites are only found around mistletoes in the branches of mature gum and wattle trees. Any type of garden can accommodate butterfly plants, including balcony gardens or window boxes. However, it is interesting to note that butterflies will not fly higher than the second storey of a building.
9. **Butterflies do not only drink nectar and lay eggs;** there are other aspects of their lives in which you can assist:
 - provide flat rocks where butterflies can sun themselves and court each other. Basking in the sun enables butterflies to be active for greater parts of the day;
 - supply mud puddles from which they can obtain essential salts. This can be done in a bird bath with moist sand;
 - provide rotten fruit such as banana and watermelon in a shallow dish, perhaps hanging in a tree. This supplies the butterflies with amino acids not available from nectar alone.
10. **Plan your garden so that all facets of butterfly gardening are covered.** Points to keep in mind are aspect, colour, maintenance, access and timing of flowers. A close assessment of your garden may reveal that many butterfly-friendly plants are already present and that the basic elements of a successful garden are already in place.

Butterfly gardening can be as simple as including a couple of native shrubs and butterflies.