

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



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Attracting Butterflies and Hummingbirds with Plants
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Relax, sit back, and watch them move from flower to flower. Butterflies and hummingbirds bring hours of enjoyment for all ages. To attract them next to your patio or garden area, plant a variety of flowering plants, including plants for the larval stage of the butterflies.

Flowering annual plants which grow in the sun and attract butterflies because of their nectar include marigold (*Tagetes* spp.), zinnia (*Zinnia elegans*), gloriosa daisy (*Rudbeckia hirta*), nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*), Sweet William (*Dianthus barbatus*), bachelor's button (*Centaurea cyanus*), cosmos (*Cosmos* spp.), sunflower (*Helianthus*), and sweet Alyssum (*Lobularia maritima*). Impatiens (*Impatiens wallerana*) is an annual that grows in the shade.

Flowering perennial plants for attracting butterflies include purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), phlox (*Phlox* spp.), butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), daylily (*Hemerocallis* spp.), aster (*Aster* spp.), blanket flower (*Gaillardia* spp.), coreopsis (*Coreopsis* spp.), chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum* spp.), dahlia (*Dahlia* spp.), hollyhock (*Alcea* spp.),

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showy sedum (*Sedum spectabile*), hibiscus (*Hibiscus* spp.), yarrow (*Achillea* spp.), rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), and thyme (*Thymus* spp.). These flowering plants prefer to grow in full sun.

Medium-sized shrubs for attracting butterflies include lilac (*Syringa* spp.), butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*), and azalea (*Rhododendron* spp.). Azaleas prefer to grow in light shade. Lilac and butterfly bush grow best in full sun.

Remember that butterflies are very near-sighted and are drawn more toward large groupings of the same type of flower than those planted singly. Groups of flowers with bright, contrasting colors make them easier for the butterflies to see. Large, single, upright blooms provide a landing area that makes extracting the nectar easier.

To complete their life cycle, the female butterfly of each species is drawn to specific plants to lay eggs on stems or leaves. After the larva, which looks like a tiny caterpillar, emerges from the egg, it begins to eat the plant.

Trees that butterfly larvae use for food include willow (*Salix* spp.), wild cherry (*Prunus* spp.), birch (*Betula* spp.), and tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*). One medium-sized shrub that butterflies use for food is spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*). These trees and shrub grow best in full sun. The spicebush will grow in partly shaded locations.

Annual plants used by butterfly larvae for food include snapdragon (*Antirrhinum* spp.), dill (*Anethum graveolens*), sweet pea (*Lathyrus odoratus*), and parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*). Full sun is the best location for these plants.

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Perennials that attract butterflies for larval food are butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), and violet (*Viola* spp.). Butterfly weed and fennel prefer full sun.

One more feature that is needed to attract butterflies is a puddle where they gather and use as a source of water. Make a puddle for butterflies by digging a small pit or trench and lining it with plastic or burying a shallow plastic container to the rim and filling it with wet sand. Entice butterflies to the puddle by pouring liquid like sweet drinks or water into it. Overripe fruit is an attractive substance.

When attracting hummingbirds, the Ruby-Throated hummingbird is reported to be the only one found east of the Mississippi River. The bird is small, measuring only 3.5 inches long. It has a needle-like bill to extract nectar from flowers. The male has a brilliant red, metallic colored throat, while the female has a white throat. Both have metallic green feathers on their backs and wings. They migrate from Mexico and begin to appear in late April. They may remain through September.

Flower nectar provides a quick source of energy for hummingbirds. They also eat small, soft-bodied insects and spiders, especially those found inside the flowers they visit for the nectar. Hummingbirds are attracted to red, pink, or orange tubular flowers.

Annual flowering plants bloom throughout the season and serve as a constant source of nectar. Annuals that attract hummingbirds include: petunia (*Petunia x hybrida*), red salvia (*Salvia splendens*), snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*), zinnia (*Zinnia*), sweet William (*Dianthus*), spider flower (*Cleome*), and nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*). I have seen hummingbirds attracted to *Salvia guaranitica* 'Black and Blue' even though the flowers are cobalt blue. Zinnias

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are easy to start from seed directly in the ground. All of these plants grow in full sun.

Hummingbirds are attracted by a variety of perennial flowering plants that return year after year. Perennials include beebalm (*Monarda didyma*), canna (*Canna*), Cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), coralbells (*Heuchera sanguinea*), hollyhock (*Alcea*), red hot poker (*Kniphofia uvaria*), gladiolus (*Gladiolus*), daylily (*Hemerocallis*), lily (*Lilium*), and butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*).

Vines and shrubs that attract hummingbirds include azalea (*Rhododendron*), butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*), trumpet creeper (*Campsis radicans*), flowering quince (*Chaenomeles*), and trumpet honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*).

To reduce competition among hummingbirds in your landscape for nectar, design several areas for plants that attract hummingbirds.

For more information, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tips:

Enjoy attracting butterflies and hummingbirds near your home by planting smaller annuals and perennials in containers.

Fall is the best time to fertilize trees and shrubs. In the spring, the roots will not be able to supply water to the new growth that is produced. By fertilizing them in the fall, root growth occurs, which supports and sustains new twig and leaf growth in the spring. Azaleas and rhododendrons are the exceptions. They should be fertilized right after blooming in the spring.

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On Going Event:

The opening of the 2025 Owensboro Regional Farmers' Market Season is Saturday, April 12, from 8 a.m. to noon at the corner of Parrish Avenue and Triplett Street.

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