

Butterflies and Birds



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Introduction

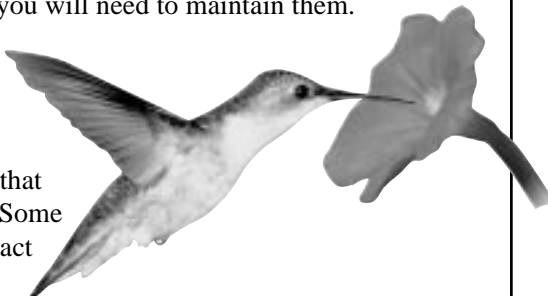
It has been said that butterflies and birds are “beauty on the wing.” Though fleeting, their presence brings an unmatched beauty to your yard and garden. If you want these visitors to stay longer, you will need to create an environment that attracts them and makes them feel at home.

Creating a sanctuary that welcomes songbirds, hummingbirds, and butterflies is relatively simple, depending on your location. A rural landscape is a much more natural habitat than the less-friendly environment of the typical suburban landscape. Close-cropped grass, sheared foundation shrubs, heavy pesticide use, and deadheaded flowers can be the formula for a well-manicured yard, but butterflies and birds will find no place to nest, no food to eat, and nowhere to hide. Even the most inhospitable yard can be transformed into a haven for butterflies and birds if you understand and provide for their three basic needs: food, cover, and water.

Food

An assortment of plant species is needed to provide berries, nuts, seeds, and other food for birds throughout the year. A variety of plants helps ensure food will be available throughout the year. If you are unable to provide enough food sources, supplement them with birdfeeders, especially during the winter. Remember that once you start using feeders, the birds will become dependant upon them and you will need to maintain them.

Hummingbirds usually feed on red, red-orange, orange, or pink tubular flowers that are nectar-rich. Some flowers that attract hummingbirds include bee balm, columbine, coral-bells, fuchsia, honeysuckle vine, lantana, nasturtiums, petunias, scarlet sage, and trumpet vine. Hummingbird feeders may also



be used to supplement nectar feeding, but you must be careful. Mix the sugar water (1 part sugar to 4 parts water) without using red food dye. Never use honey. Thoroughly wash the feeders at least once a week and more often when the temperature is high. Space the feeders around the house to help prevent fighting by the males.

There are two aspects to providing food for butterflies. Flowers provide nectar for adult butterflies, and other host plants provide food for developing caterpillars. Some flowers that attract adult butterflies are bee balm, butterfly bush, cardinal flower, coneflower, daisies, goldenrod, honeysuckle, lilac, marigolds, mints, mock orange, phlox, yarrow, and zinnias. Some host plants for caterpillars are carrots, dill, cherry, mustards, oaks, and willows. Some plants are both nectar and host plants. They include aster, butterfly weed, clovers, milkweed, sunflowers, thistle, vetch, and violets. Remember that host plants are eaten by the caterpillars and should be placed so that they are less visible.

Cover

Most birds rarely stray far from dense cover. In addition to providing good nesting sites, the cover provides protection from predators and adverse weather. Although hummingbirds appear to be very active, they spend 80 percent of the day resting on a perch. Butterflies are delicate creatures and seek cover at night and when it is rainy or windy. Evergreens and dense deciduous trees, shrubs, and trellised vines provide the protection butterflies and birds need.

Water

A birdbath can provide a water source for butterflies and birds. The water should be less than 3 inches deep, with pebbles or rocks above the water for butterflies and smaller birds to perch on while drinking. Birdbaths should be cleaned once a week. Other water sources, especially for hummingbirds and butterflies, can be a mud puddle, a sprinkler, and the drops of the water left on the foliage after you water plants.

Making a Plan

The best way to start attracting butterflies and birds to your yard and garden is to take an inventory of what is currently there. Draw a rough map showing the locations of your plants. Use a field guide to identify any unknown plants and evaluate the usefulness of your existing plants as food and shelter.

Once you know and understand what you have, begin to look at areas that aren't attractive to butterflies and birds. Large areas of open lawn don't provide food or shelter. You may also want to remove or replace undesirable plants. Concentrate on plants that will provide food during times when nothing else is available in your yard and garden.

Trying to transform your yard and garden overnight is a sure way to become frustrated, and it can lead to failure. Gradually make changes, focusing on one or two each season. Plan to add plants as your time and budget allow.

Don't take shortcuts. Properly prepare the soil, and water and mulch your new plants so they get off to a good start. Also remember that as you add plants, you will need to devote more time to caring for your landscape.

Over the years, your yard will become friendlier to butterflies and birds. This new environment will benefit not only the wildlife, but also you. Enjoy changing your landscape and the butterflies and birds it attracts.

References

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