

Plant a Butterfly Garden



Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify that pollination is important to many plants and, consequently, to humans. Describe the role that butterflies play in pollination.
- Identify and describe which butterflies may be rare or endangered and why.
- Describe the importance of suitable habitat to butterfly survival.
- Describe actions that people can take to contribute to healthy pollinator habitats.



Method

Students plant a school garden to provide habitat for butterflies and other pollinators.



Materials

- Basic gardening tools
- Seeds or nursery stock for native perennials
- Sunny space in the school yard or planting boxes

Background

A well-planned garden can provide habitat over much of the life cycle of some of Canada's beautiful butterflies: hidden spaces for eggs to hatch, green leaves and stems for caterpillars to browse, safe places for pupae to mature, and sweet, sweet nectar for emerging (or visiting) adults.

In a world where natural pockets of habitat are becoming increasingly scarce, especially outside protected areas such as parks, your contribution will likely be well used by myriad winged wildlife. They will return the favour by performing that essential service for renewing ecosystems — pollination.

Butterfly species vary across Canada and have adapted to local plants. With close to 300 butterfly species living in Canada for all or part of their life cycle, it can be tough to know who's who. It is important to consider that before a butterfly can spread its wings, its early life form - the caterpillar - must successfully grow and survive. Caterpillars aren't often given a fair chance, but hopefully you'll discover the magnificence in these little creatures before they spread their wings.

CWF's [Wild About Butterflies poster](#) can help you identify some 17 of the more common and colourful species and their caterpillar counterparts.

For additional resources visit:

CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca/Education

Activity

In Advance

- Find a small corner away from heavy use in the schoolyard, or flower boxes situated in appropriate outdoor locations. If appropriate, involve students in selecting a location and obtaining permission from the appropriate authorities.

Procedure

1. Discuss:
 - The importance of pollinators and pollination.
 - Threats to pollinators, linking the discussion to cases of rare butterflies.
 - What people can do to help pollinators such as butterflies.
2. Let students know that they will be taking part in creating a butterfly garden in their schoolyard.
 - Involve students in researching local species of butterflies they wish to attract to the garden and the species of native plants that are appropriate for the site.
 - Involve the students in planning the garden project, including:
 - Developing a landscape plan.
 - Sourcing chosen plants.
 - Communications with the school community.
 - A work plan for the project.
 - A duty roster for the care and tending of the garden.
3. Once your plan has been developed, it's time to implement it! At your selected site, guide the students in planting varieties of hardy, native flowering plants. Mature plants work best with younger students to prevent tiny feet from breaking seedlings.
4. Over the following weeks or months:
 - Involve students in the care of the plants (regular watering and weeding).
 - Have students observe, sketch and talk about the butterflies that visit their garden.
 - Involve students in monitoring the garden and keeping a written, photographic or video log.

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Here is a list of general tips to keep in mind when planning your butterfly garden!

- Have students research and plan a garden to inspire feelings of ownership and responsibility.

- Plant in the spring.

- Choose sunny spots protected from strong winds and foot traffic.

- Use a variety of plants that will bloom from spring through to fall.

- Select plants native to your region. Avoid exotic, invasive plants that compete with native species to the detriment of local ecosystems.

- Include plants that provide food for caterpillars, like willow and milkweed.

- Use butterfly-friendly plants such as aster, dogbane, fleabane, goldenrod, milkweed, coneflowers, black-eyed Susan and lupine.

- Water regularly and weed out undesired growth.

- Provide essential nutrients for mud-puddling butterflies with a muddy spot.

- Mulch to help conserve moisture and reduce weeds, which will be important in the summer when the school is empty.

- Allow an area to include leaf litter, logs or brush for hibernating butterflies.

- Create basking spots for butterflies by placing a few flat stones in sunny, sheltered locations.

- Avoid using pesticides in your garden so these delicate animals are not negatively affected.

- Recruit parent volunteers to help enrich students' experience.

For more information, check out CWF's [Gardening for Butterflies](#) handout!

For additional resources visit:

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