How to Create a Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden

How to Create a Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden
Part 1: Know Who You Are Inviting

(understanding hummingbirds & butterflies)

by Patricia Sutton

Each year the garden creeps into the yard a bit more and the mowed portion diminishes, much to the delight of hummingbirds, butterflies, moths, and me. Soon there will be nothing left to mow but pathways through wildflower gardens. In 1990 New Jersey Audubon readers enjoyed an earlier version of this article. Since then I’ve learned a great deal more and am excited to share it here.

Our jeweled avian guests begin arriving each year in April, some years as early as the 4th and some years as late as the 28th, but normally between the 19th and the 23rd. In southern New Jersey Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (the East’s only breeding hummingbird) time their arrival with the blooming of Flowering Quince. Elsewhere it may be Crabapple, Apple, Blueberry, Azalea, Autumn Olive, Black Locust, or Tulip Tree blossoms that first draw them in. During early spring cold snaps a hummingbird’s life may be saved as it feeds on sap flowing from trees and shrubs where yellow-bellied sapsuckers have drilled their holes.

Hummingbird Feeders -- Good or Bad?

Despite yeoman efforts, my gardens in April and May are pretty sparse for hungry hummingbirds. So, to intercept spring migrants and hold onto them as potential nesting birds, I hang hummingbird feeders in mid-April. Males arrive first and some years one buzzes in as I’m hanging the first feeder. From that day forward hummingbirds are regulars at my feeders and in budding tree tops as they flit after spiders and other insects. The constant source of food that a feeder can provide (April through October) in a garden that is always changing, and where nectar is not constant, may be what entices a hummingbird to nest in your yard or nearby.

The proper solution for a feeder is one part sugar and four parts water (or one cup of sugar added to four cups of water). A stronger sugar concentration could be hard for the birds to digest or lead to liver damage. A quart can be made at a time and extra stored in the refrigerator. Red dye is unnecessary, even discouraged; most hummingbird feeders have red parts that serve quite well to attract the birds. A honey solution may lead to a fatal fungus disease in hummingbirds.

A mandatory responsibility that comes with the enjoyment feeders bring is maintaining their cleanliness and supplying fresh solution. They must be cleaned thoroughly with hot, soapy water and then rinsed with boiling hot water at least once a week, and more frequently (every two to three days) during the extreme heat of summer. Then refill with fresh solution, even if birds are not diminishing the supply. Otherwise, old solution ferments and could even be harmful once it turns into alcohol. Early in the spring when feeder activity is low, I only put an inch or so of solution in each feeder. Actually the only time I fill feeders to the top is during heavy use, from late June to early September.
The Cape May Bird Observatory and other New Jersey Audubon Society centers sell and highly recommend HummZinger feeders because they are so well thought out and educational: (1) they're easy and quick to clean, (2) have no hidden parts where mold can grow, (3) directions for feeder solution are printed inside feeder so you can not forget, (4) have a built in ant moat, (5) have no yellow parts (yellow attracts bees and wasps), and (6) saucer design makes it impossible for bees and wasps to reach the solution.

I am often asked if hummingbird feeders are "bad." No, they are not, as long as they're maintained and not the only source of food in a yard. Feeders should complement yards full of nectar sources and healthy insect populations. This mix of food (evolving gardens and always-available feeders) is what may entice a hummingbird to nest in or near your yard. When their favored nectar sources are blooming, hummingbirds will ignore feeders. In New Jersey this is the case in late spring when Japanese Honeysuckle blooms (May 25 to June 15). Continue to maintain feeders even when they're not in use. The hummingbirds will be back.

**Hummingbirds Galore!**

From late June through September 5 feeders may be used so heavily that they must be filled every few days or every day. This is when you really have an opportunity to study this tiny jewel. Sometimes four to six birds, both adults and newly fledged young, might be vying for a place at one feeder. Males are extremely territorial, often known to chase even their own young from feeders and gardens. They are all so busy dashing after one another you wonder when they have a chance to feed. In our half-acre yard we put out five feeders, placing them so that one territorial male cannot see more than one or two feeders at once. This has reduced competition and more birds have a chance to feed. By September 8th use drops off dramatically; by mid-month all the resident hummingbirds have left, and the feeder is unattended except for the occasional migrant. Most avid hummingbird gardeners leave their feeders up until hard freezes (in December), since late fall is when western rarities like Black-chinned, Calliope, Allen's, and Rufous Hummingbirds have appeared in gardens with feeders in New Jersey.

**A Successful Hummingbird Garden**

Many flowering plants attract hummingbirds. Most are tubular in shape and many are red, though certainly not all. A successful hummingbird garden provides nectar sources from May through the first frost. There is a great temptation to plant acres of Bee Balm or Cardinal Flower, two of their favorite nectar sources. But in each case nectar would be available for just a brief period in a hummingbird's life. The wise gardener selects an assortment of flowering plants with overlapping blooming periods, mixes perennials and annuals, and lets some of nature's wildflowers and weeds persist, many of which are favored by hummingbirds and butterflies.

**Add Butterflies and Moths to the Mix**

What is a hummingbird garden without the added dazzle of butterflies and moths? Quite simply, plants chosen to attract hummingbirds will often attract butterflies and moths too. The core of my butterfly and hummingbird garden is a large corridor of Tropical Sage (4 feet by 12 feet, with plants every 10 inches), a dozen Butterfly Bushes, and sizeable patches of Bee Balm, Butterfly Weed, Common and Swamp Milkweed, Joe-pye-weed, Mistflower, Phlox, Purple Coneflower, New England Aster, Seaside Goldenrod, Zinnias, Sedum, Brazilian Vervain, Mexican Sunflower, and a pond edged with Pickerelweed. All this is interspersed with many other flowers, herbs, and volunteer weeds like Queen Anne's Lace, Lamb's Quarters, Curled Dock, and flowering trees, shrubs, and vines.

**Plant IT and They Will Come**

Plant a butterfly and hummingbird garden and they will come. Lure butterflies right into your own yard so that you can savor them. You'll first notice the big, showy swallowtails, but actually most butterflies are tiny and easily overlooked. Be sure to take binoculars when you go out to enjoy your garden. Butterflies
are easily flushed by movement, so be sure to look ahead at your flowers for visitors. A butterfly’s camouflage is amazing and the naked eye can’t be counted on to detect many of them. Binoculars are essential. A camera is fun too, but be sure to move in slowly and low so as not to cross over them with your shadow and you might get an eye-popping photo or naked eye look.

Most moths are active at night. Treat yourself on a moonlit night to a stroll through your gardens to see another world unfold, as many of the flowers so attractive to butterflies by day are adorned with moths at night. By day you may see Hummingbird Moths in your gardens; the two species to expect are Hummingbird Clearwing and Snowberry Clearwing. Hummingbird Clearwings are bigger, have red markings in their clear wings, and greenish bodies; Snowberry Clearwings are a bit smaller and resemble bumble bees with their yellow and black bodies, camouflage key to their survival. They hover like a hummingbird before the flowers and are a fun addition to any garden.

Click [here](#) for the plant list that compliments this article, "Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths"

Unusual Preferences

Quite a few butterflies (and moths) prefer feces, urine, and rotten fruit to flowers. Not owning any fruit trees, I buy pears, peaches, bananas, and watermelon to attract butterflies. In recent years I’ve cultivated a relationship with my favorite farm stand. They now save their spoiled fruit for me. Watermelon is the easiest attractant. Place a flat slice on a plate, dolling out new slices as the first dries out or gets moldy. Bananas have worked the best for me and they’re always available, but they aren’t always rotten enough to attract butterflies. I’ve learned to peel and freeze them; once thawed they are nice and liquidy and immediately attractive to butterflies. My homemade butterfly feeder is nothing more than a ceramic plate with a lip (so liquids don’t drip off) filled with gooey bananas and hung from a tree by a simple plant hanger. I suspend it, rather than place it on the ground, so ants do not make off with the precious bananas. A little fresh orange juice each day keeps the bananas moist and attractive a while longer to the normally elusive butterflies. Red-spotted Purple, Red Admiral, Question Mark, Eastern Comma, Mourning Cloak, Common Wood-Nymph, Little Wood-Satyr, Appalachian Brown, Hackberry Emperor, and Tawny Emperor butterflies have all enjoyed feeding at my dish of fruit by day, and at night a rich assortment of moths finds it irresistible.

Providing water adds another enticement into your yard. Garden sprinklers draw in hummingbirds and mud puddles please butterflies. Misters and drips are a more permanent solution than a garden sprinkler. They are easy to set up and readily available now that gardening for wildlife has caught on. My mister is set up to spray down through tree branches and into a series of birdbaths. I’ve utilized the moist ground and planted Cardinal Flower, Joe-pye-weed, and other plants that like wet feet under the mister. Hummingbirds find it irresistible; they fly through the mist and often bathe in the drips collected on leaves.

A killing frost wilts the last flowers in late October and the parade of butterflies wanes. A few hardy species (Cabbage White, Orange Sulphur, Question Mark, Eastern Comma, Red Admiral, Monarch, Common Buckeye) may be seen through November and into early December. The deep freeze winter months seem endless without these entertaining gems. Just how they survive the winter is important to understand because it relates to recommended gardening practices.

Great Reasons for an Untidy Garden

About fifteen or so of the commonly seen butterflies in New Jersey cannot survive our winters in any form (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, or adult butterfly) and must migrate south in the fall or die. Each spring or fall,
in some cases, they migrate north and repopulate New Jersey from the south. Nearly all the rest of our butterflies pass the winter in our gardens not as an adult butterfly, but as an egg on a plant, a caterpillar in a curled-up leaf or down in the leaf litter, or a chrysalis attached to a plant stem in a sheltered spot. The adult butterflies died months before, after laying eggs. For this very reason I often leave my garden standing through the winter. Otherwise I would be carting off next year’s potential butterflies as I tidied up.

Another excellent excuse to be a lazy gardener in the fall is that the spring through fall butterfly garden turns into a winter bird garden. Many birds find shelter in the still standing garden and feed on the abundant seed heads.

Only four different butterflies winter as adults here in New Jersey: Mourning Cloak, Question Mark, Eastern Comma, and Compton Tortoiseshell. They survive the cold months in protected nooks and crannies, down inside woodpiles, under shutters or shingles, or inside hollow trees. Hence, these are the only four species that might use a butterfly house. On a warm winter day you may find Mourning Cloaks or Compton Tortoiseshells lilting about, but as soon as the temperature drops they’ll return to their safe nook or cranny. By March, as the weather warms, some of the butterflies that winter as an egg, a caterpillar, or a chrysalis, are beginning to complete their metamorphosis and emerge as adult butterflies. And by April more and more adult butterflies are emerging and can be enjoyed.

--Patricia Sutton

**Much of the information in this article is derived from Pat Sutton’s long experience with gardening in Cape May County, and some of the flowering periods and bird arrival dates reflect this. Readers living in areas other than the southern Coastal Plain of New Jersey may wish to adapt their gardening accordingly.**

---Patricia Sutton is Program Director for the Cape May Bird Observatory, and author of *How to Spot an Owl, How to Spot Hawks & Eagles, and How to Spot a Butterfly.* She has taught hundreds of backyard habitat workshops for New Jersey Audubon Society’s Cape May Bird Observatory since 1988.

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**Part 2: Planning The Garden**

*(sage advice)*

[click here](#)

**How to Create a Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden**

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How to Create a Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden
Part 2: Planning The Garden

by Patricia Sutton

(Part 1 -- click here)

Plant a butterfly and hummingbird garden and they will come. But first . . . you might want to consider the following sage advice!

Choose a Sunny Location. Butterflies are solar powered. They need to be warm and dry to fly. A simple cloud crossing over the sun will make butterfly activity drop from dozens during a sunny stretch to none a few minutes later when cloudy. If you do not have an open yard, plant a series of gardens that will take advantage of sunny spots as the sun moves through your yard. The butterflies will move from garden to garden with the sun.

Provide Shelter. Butterflies are delicate and can be blown about easily. Gardens on edges of your yard, up against shrubby or forested areas or a fence, can offer considerable protection from strong winds. Gardens placed out in the most open part of your property to take advantage of sun all day long will be more attractive to butterflies if designed to also offer shelter. A horseshoe shaped garden that utilizes flowering shrubs offers nectar out of the wind on at least one of its edges no matter what direction the wind is blowing, even on the windiest day. Hummingbirds utilize cover near gardens and feeders in between feeding sessions. Dead snags or bare twigs in nearby shrubs become favored resting spots and can be predictable places to search for perched hummingbirds. Keep in mind too that hummingbirds favor slim, downward sloping branches over open areas for their nests, just the sort of branches that border your open yard and gardens. Keep this in mind when trimming in the early spring.

The Importance of Diversity. A wide open grass lawn with a lone butterfly and hummingbird garden in the middle of it may attract some activity, but probably very little compared to an area with lots of options. Diversity is the key. Incorporate into your plan formal and informal gardens, natural or weedy areas or edges, plantings of trees and shrubs, a wildflower meadow, and the minimal amount of lawn you need. Butterfly and hummingbird activity will skyrocket.

Visit Other Gardens for Layout and Design Ideas. (1) The Cape May Bird Observatory's "Cape May Birding and Butterflying Map" highlights a number of public gardens in Cape May County (Hereford Inlet Lighthouse Gardens, Cape May Water Conservation Garden, Pavilion Circle Gardens in Cape May Point, and the gardens at the three New Jersey Audubon Centers in Cape May County), (2) Cape May Bird Observatory (CMBO) and several other NJ Audubon centers host tours of private butterfly gardens in New Jersey each summer and fall (click here for news of garden tours and other learning opportunities), (3) the "Model Backyard Habitat" at the CMBO Center for Research and Education in Goshen (600 Rt. 47 North) includes extensive butterfly and hummingbird gardens and habitats, and (4) each of NJ Audubon's centers have wildlife gardens to explore and learn from.
**Work With What You Already Have.**  Incorporate your gardens into available spots. Do not cut down your forest to put in a butterfly garden or create a meadow. Use some of your mowed lawn instead. Study the list of caterpillar foodplants in the accompanying pdf file of "Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths" to learn the value of the trees, shrubs, vines, and weedy plants that may already exist in your yard.

**Long Term Planning.** Sketch a plan for your property incorporating all the elements mentioned above that you want in your garden habitats. The plan can be carried out in stages, each year tackling a different garden, meadow, pond area, shrub border, whatever. But, you'll find it very helpful to have a rough plan to be working from. If a permanent watering system is possible, consider it early on before you've planted hundreds of dollars worth of plants. Such a watering system will help you through drought periods and in the first year of a new garden's life. By planting natives and the other recommended plants on our list you should be able to keep watering to a minimum, if needed at all.

### Plant Selection

There are dozens and dozens of books on butterfly and hummingbird gardening, and their lists of recommended plants is extensive, even to the point of being unhelpfully so. Too, a few marginal plants, like Yarrow and Black-eyed Susan, have slipped onto these lists and are perpetuated in book after book.

The list of recommended nectar plantings and host plantings that accompanies this article is the result of years of gardening for butterflies and hummingbirds in southern New Jersey and visiting other gardens in New Jersey, surrounding states, and when traveling around the country. Jane Ruffin (Rosement, PA), Karen Williams (Woodbine, NJ), Jim Dowdell (Villas, NJ), Michael Pollock (northern NJ), and Denise Gibbs (Gaithersburg, MD) all played key roles in fine tuning this list to reflect the very best choices for this region.

As you review the list you'll see that certain aspects of it make it highly useful. The top nectar plants for both butterflies and hummingbirds are listed as "Chocolate Cakes." This is Jane Ruffin's term for the flowers that are irresistible to butterflies no matter what else is in bloom. Jane, Karen, Jim, Michael, Denise and I were all surprised by differences in each of our gardens, even when less than ten miles apart. A Chocolate Cake in one yard held little interest for butterflies in another. I think the key to this is whether or not you have massed plantings of that particular plant. For instance, Purple Coneflower in my yard is barely used, but then I have a dozen Butterfly Bushes stealing the show and the Purple Coneflower is sprinkled here and there, not planted in huge patches.

**Click here for the plant list that accompanies this article:**
"Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths"

Many of these plants are available for sale at the CMBO Center for Research and Education in Goshen and during special plant sales (click here for selection).

**Be Selective and Plant in Masses.** A garden with one-hundred different kinds of plants, one or two of each, is much less attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds than massed plantings of well selected plants. You'll probably want to include all the "Chocolate Cakes," using them as the backbone of your gardens. Be sure to cover the tough times too by providing early spring bloomers and plants that bloom right up until the first heavy frost in late fall.

**Mix Perennials and Annuals.** Perennials only need to be planted once; they live from year to year, with varying blooming periods. Over time many perennials need to be divided, providing you with new plants to stretch your gardens even further into the yard or to give away to friends or acquaintances you're trying to convert into wildlife gardeners. Annuals are short-lived plants; their entire life cycle takes
place in one growing season. They must be planted from seed each year. Many of them have a longer blooming period than perennials and they can be tuck into bare spots in your perennial garden as filler. Many annuals bloom right up until the frost.

**Natives.** Chose as many native plants as possible. It's the right thing to do! Being native, they belong here, and will require less care (water, fertilizer, pampering). I am a purist when it comes to tree, shrub, & vine selection for bird gardens / food, but not when it comes to butterfly and hummingbird gardening. In my own gardens I've included as many natives as possible (native to NJ and native to North America), but compliment native plantings with Chocolate Cake alien plants that are not invasive and fill in quiet times in the garden, so there is an unending offering of intense nectar spring through the first hard frost.

**Learn how to grow native plants from seed.**

**Natives for Sale** ([click here](#)). Support NJ Audubon with plant purchases. The CMBO Center for Research and Education sells plants spring through fall that have been grown for CMBO by *Flora For Fauna*, a local nursery specializing in habitat gardens. Many native species are offered. Natives have been nursery propagated by seeds and cuttings from plant populations maintained for that purpose. No plant offered for sale has been collected from the wild. Other NJ Audubon centers have special plant sales.

**Provide Nectar Spring Through Late Fall.** Choose from the accompanying list as many plants as you can that flower in the spring. But also value and spare some of your "weeds" that are spring bloomers (mustards, Purple Dead Nettle, clovers, Dandelion, Common Strawberry) and note the butterfly activity they attract.

Include long-blooming nectar plants like Butterfly Bush in your gardens. Butterfly Bush begins blooming in July and blooms right up until the frost, some years into early November. This is a real bonus for migrating Monarchs and late moving hummingbirds. To encourage such a lengthy blooming season does require some work. You need to "dead head" the spent flower heads, otherwise the plant puts its energy into developing seeds and stops producing flowers. Too with all the concern about Butterfly Bush being a possible invasive plant, by dead heading it you nip this in the bud! In the spring I cut each shrub back to one foot high, since all the flowers are produced on new growth. In no time they are again sizeable shrubs and in bloom.

Save space in your gardens for long-blooming annuals such as Zinnias, Mexican Sunflower, Tropical Sage, and Tropical Milkweed. Some gardeners swear by marigolds, though they have too much competition in my yard to be attractive to butterflies. All of these annuals bloom right up until the frost, an important time period to cover. Tender shrubs that will also bloom until the first frost are Pentas and Lantana. I pot mine up and bring them indoors before the first frost, enjoy their indoor blooms all winter long, and then put them out again in the spring.

It is fun to plan a garden but not very easy when you have no idea what many of the plants look like. Many mail-order catalogues are illustrated with excellent photos of perennials (and, in some cases, annuals) in bloom. Spring catalogues are more complete and they arrive in winter, a good time to plan for the following spring and summer. Get on their mailing lists.

**Maintenance is a Key Consideration**

You want to enjoy your gardens and their visitors, not bog down in maintenance tasks. As I've become more and more focused on gardening for butterflies, hummingbirds, and birds in general it has been a wonderful excuse to garden in a more relaxed fashion. The knowledge that my garden is full of butterfly eggs, caterpillars, and chrysalids scattered throughout (indeed the next generation of butterflies I can look forward to) is my rational for not being too tidy during the growing season and through the winter. To conserve water and keep plants in my formal gardens alive during summer's heat I've found that mulching with grass clippings is the perfect solution. The grass is free; an acquaintance with a lawn mowing service drops off six or so full trash cans and picks up (to be refilled) the empty cans from the previous week. The grass clippings eventually break down into rich soil. I smother weeds with grass clippings (before they can crowd out my perennials) and surround newly planted annuals with it too. As weeds again peek through I add new layers of grass clippings.
Caterpillar Foodplants for Butterflies

In order to meet all butterfly needs, it is important to understand their biology. Most adult butterflies only live two to three weeks, and a few species only live three days. (The longer-lived butterflies hibernate through the winter months as adults.) The bulk of a butterfly’s life is spent becoming a butterfly: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, and finally adult. An adult butterfly’s primary function is to mate, lay eggs, and create the next generation. Butterflies lay their eggs on specific plants known as caterpillar food plants (or host plants). Some butterfly species lay their eggs on only one specific caterpillar foodplant. The Baltimore Checkerspot uses only Turtlehead (white), ‘Olive’ Juniper Hairstreaks use only Red Cedar. The monarch lays its eggs on many members of the milkweed family, in our area using Common Milkweed, Butterfly Weed, Swamp Milkweed, and planted beds of Tropical Milkweed. The Gray Hairstreak is one of the most widespread butterflies in North America because it uses so many different caterpillar foodplants. Many of the trees, shrubs, vines, wildflowers, weeds, and grasses encouraged or planted in my yard are important to the life cycle of butterflies and moths. A garden that only supplies nectar forces butterflies to move on in search of caterpillar foodplants.

Do a casual survey to find out how many caterpillar foodplants you already have in your yard, using the list that accompanies this article. See which new host plants you can tuck into your perennial flower beds or choose when planting a new tree, shrub, or vine. Maybe you already have wild violets. Rather than remove them to make way for other plants, work around them now that you know they are used by fritillaries for egg laying. Many gardeners are appalled when they find their Parsley, Dill, or Fennel patch ravaged by large, ornate, green and black striped caterpillars. I and others have learned to intersperse large patches of Fennel, Parsley, and Dill right into our perennial flower beds. The result, a yard full of newly emerged Black Swallowtails and still plenty of seasoning for the kitchen. Many caterpillar foodplants are “weeds,” plants we’ve all pulled out of our yards and gardens at one time or another, like Queen Anne’s Lace, Lamb’s Quarters, Sweet Everlasting, Sheep Sorrel. After reviewing this partial list of caterpillar foodplants used by local butterflies and moths, you may have new respect for these plants and learn to tolerate and maybe even enjoy them in your yard.

Click here for the list that accompanies this article of “Recommended Caterpillar Foodplants”

To Weed or Not to Weed?

If you garden for butterflies and hummingbirds, many “weeds” take on a new significance. The presence of unkempt areas near your formal gardens, where nature is given free rein, might contribute more than you think to your garden’s success. Weeds like Large-flowered Vetch cling to my garden fence and frequently draw hummingbirds away from my more formal and planned garden. As already discussed, many weedy plants are essential host plants for some of our favorite butterflies. Most of our butterflies winter in the egg, caterpillar, or chrysalis stage. I no longer tidy up my garden in the fall but leave the flower stalks standing. Not only do many birds feed on the seed heads through the winter, but this approach allows butterfly eggs, caterpillars, and chrysalids to remain safely scattered throughout my garden. I stopped raking leaves when I learned that Luna Moths winter in their silken leaf-wrapped cocoons under Sweet Gum trees and that Hackberry Emperors winter as partially grown caterpillars in fallen leaves under Hackberry trees. The “too tidy” gardener is literally and physically bagging up and carting off next spring’s butterflies. Actually, butterflies are an excellent excuse to spend less time fussing and more time enjoying the garden visitors. Sara Stein’s excellent book, Noah’s Garden, and Michael Pollan’s Second Nature, a Gardener’s Education wonderfully explain the importance of a more relaxed view of gardening.

Wildflower Meadow

Now that you realize the value of grasses and weedy plants, consider incorporating a wildflower meadow into your butterfly and hummingbird habitat plan, even if it is a small flowerbed-size meadow. The easiest way to begin your meadow is to simply stop mowing. If the area has not been chemically treated, a rich diversity of plants will come up in just the first year, including a number of wildflowers. You can speed things along by planting a wavy line of wildflowers through your meadow (New England Aster, goldenrod, various
milkweeds, and Purple Coneflower). Denise Gibbs recommends planting your wildflower seedlings or plugs in this wavy line or pattern so that when seeds disperse, it looks as it would in a natural meadow.

**Sexy Meadow . . . Nuisance Weeds?** If you live where uncut grass is unacceptable to your neighbors or if you are trying to accomplish this on a schoolyard, make your meadow more pleasing: (1) surround it with a low split rail fence, (2) mow a walking path around it and a winding path through it, and (3) place a sign at the entrance stating that the area is a "Wildflower Meadow for Butterflies." Of course the birds, bees, moths, and other critters will benefit too, but butterflies have a magic appeal. To keep your meadow a meadow it must be partly mowed once each year, preferably in the spring, otherwise woody shrubs and trees will seed there and eventually turn your meadow into a shrubby area, and finally into a forest. As shrubs move in it becomes harder and harder to mow. It is important to do the mowing in the spring, not in the fall, for a number of reasons: (1) the foot-high grasses and wildflowers provide important cover to birds and other wildlife through the winter, and their seed heads provide important survival food through the winter; (2) many butterflies go through their life cycle (egg, caterpillar, chrysalis) tucked down in the weedy growth of your meadow. This being the case, rotation mowing helps make sure some survive: mow half the meadow one spring and half the next spring.

I hope that your lawn too will become a series of pathways through blooming garden habitats! In your gardening efforts, keep good notes. They'll pay off and prove very helpful to you and other gardeners in your area. I’d love to hear from you; pass along your garden’s “Chocolate Cakes” and other nectar attractants so that they can be included in future updates of this article and other NJ Audubon materials.

--Patricia Sutton

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**Part 1:**

**Know Who You Are Inviting**

(understanding hummingbirds & butterflies)

[click here](#)

**Key Plants**

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**Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths**

by Patricia Sutton
With the terrific help of coworker Michael Pollock, we've tried to make the selection of plants as strong and useful as possible!

**HOW TO USE THIS LIST**

**It clearly indicates:**

**TRIED & TRUE FAVORITES**

**NECTAR PLANTS:**
Perennials, Annuals, Vines, Shrubs, & Trees

**CATERPILLAR FOODPLANTS**
(for butterflies & moths):
Perennials, Annuals, Grasses & Sedges, Vines, Shrubs, & Trees

**SUITABLE FOR THE NORTHEAST**

This list is the result of years of gardening for butterflies and hummingbirds in southern New Jersey, and visiting other gardens in New Jersey, surrounding states, and around the country. Jane Ruffin (Rosemont, PA), Karen Williams (Woodbine, NJ), Jim Dowdell (Villas, NJ), Michael Pollock (northern NJ), and Denise Gibbs (Gaithersburg, MD) all played key roles in fine-tuning this list to reflect the very best choices for this region. Many friends shared their favorites and further strengthened this list. I'd love to hear from you too if you have a plant to add.

**NATIVES**

With the keen interest to use as many native plants as possible, we are very grateful to Karl Anderson for his annotation of this list to reflect natives.

The list delineates plant origin:
native to New Jersey (NJ), native to North America (NA), or alien (Alien).

**ALIENS**

I am a purist when it comes to tree, shrub, & vine selection for bird gardens / food, but not when it comes to butterfly and hummingbird gardening. This list includes a number of plants not native to New Jersey and a few not even native to the U.S., but which can be used, particularly in small gardens, to provide nectar sources to fill in the times during the summer and late fall when native sources are less common.

In all cases avoid invasive non-native plants that will spread beyond your garden.

**OFFERINGS SPRING THROUGH FALL**

To attract and hold butterflies and hummingbirds a garden needs to offer nectar spring through the first
hard frost in late fall. This list shares time of bloom for each of the plants so gardeners can do just that. Spring (1), Summer (2), Fall (3), until frost (4).

**CHOCOLATE CAKE (CC)** This is Jane Ruffin's terrific term for the flowering plants that are irresistible to butterflies and hummingbirds no matter what else is in bloom. We found that a Chocolate Cake in one garden sometimes attracted little attention in another. Massed plantings made all difference. If you have a tiny area to garden, focus on Chocolate Cakes.

**SUN (S) or SHADE (sh), COLOR, and TYPE OF PLANT:**
- **Annual (A)**
- **Perennial (P)**
- **Biennial (B)**
- **Tender Perennial (TP)**
- **Tender Shrub (TS)**

**CATERPILLAR FOODPLANTS**
This list includes many weeds, trees, shrubs, and vines that you may already have in your yard as well as others you can plant that are sought by adult butterflies and moths for egg laying (to create the next generation).

**Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths**

[a pdf file]

Be sure to read the article that accompanies this list, "How to Create a Butterfly & Hummingbird Garden"

Part 1 -- Know Who You Are Inviting: Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths
Part 2 -- Planning the Garden: Sage Advice

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**Key Plants**

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With the terrific help of coworker Michael Pollock, we've tried to make the selection of plants as strong and useful as possible!

HOW TO USE THIS LIST
It clearly indicates:

TRIED & TRUE FAVORITES

NECTAR PLANTS:
Perennials, Annuals, Vines, Shrubs, & Trees

CATERPILLAR FOODPLANTS
(for butterflies & moths):
Perennials, Annuals, Grasses & Sedges,
Vines, Shrubs, & Trees

SUITABLE FOR THE NORTHEAST

This list is the result of years of gardening for butterflies and hummingbirds in southern New Jersey, and visiting other gardens in New Jersey, surrounding states, and around the country. Jane Ruffin (Rosemont, PA), Karen Williams (Woodbine, NJ), Jim Dowdell (Villas, NJ), Michael Pollock (northern NJ), and Denise Gibbs (Gaithersburg, MD) all played key roles in fine-tuning this list to reflect the very best choices for this region. Many friends shared their favorites and further strengthened this list. I’d love to hear from you too if you have a plant to add.

NATIVES  With the keen interest to use as many native plants as possible, we are very grateful to Karl Anderson for his annotation of this list to reflect natives.
The list delineates plant origin:
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ALIENS
I am a purist when it comes to tree, shrub, & vine selection for bird gardens / food, but not when it comes to butterfly and hummingbird gardening. This list includes a number of plants not native to New Jersey and a few not even native to the U.S., but which can be used, particularly in small gardens, to provide nectar sources to fill in the times during the summer and late fall when native sources are less common.
In all cases avoid invasive non-native plants that will spread beyond your garden.
OFFERINGS SPRING THROUGH FALL
To attract and hold butterflies and hummingbirds a garden needs to offer nectar spring through the first hard frost in late fall. This list shares time of bloom for each of the plants so gardeners can do just that. Spring (1), Summer (2), Fall (3), until frost (4).

CHOCOLATE CAKE (CC) This is Jane Ruffin's terrific term for the flowering plants that are irresistible to butterflies and hummingbirds no matter what else is in bloom. We found that a Chocolate Cake in one garden sometimes attracted little attention in another. Massed plantings made all difference. If you have a tiny area to garden, focus on Chocolate Cakes.

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Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths [a pdf file]
Downloaded the file-patty

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Key Plants
Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, & Moths

by Patricia Sutton

view list [pdf]

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Pat’s sites on NJ Audubon

Before the tours, download, print, and read NJ Audubon’s 2-parted article “How to Create a Butterfly and Hummingbird Garden” and the “Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, and Moths” by garden tour leader Pat Sutton. Available at: www.njaudubon.org/Education/BackyardHabitat/ButterHummGarden.html and www.njaudubon.org/Education/BackyardHabitat/KeyPlants.html

Bring the list of “Recommended Plantings to Attract Hummingbirds, Butterflies, and Moths” to annotate during the tour with favorite plants you’ve learned about.