

Attracting butterflies to your garden



Adult butterflies need a nectar source, a meeting place and protection from predators. The plant list below is a start to creating a garden which will attract butterflies to visit you. However, if you want them to stay and breed, you will need to establish their caterpillar food-plants as well. A list of some of the Urban butterfly food-plants is provided below.

A garden should not be just a collection of plants scattered anywhere, but a balanced and natural environment attractive to living things. It has to be inviting for all of us; a place to relax. Appropriately designed “natural” gardens can be low maintenance and have the botanical splendour to lure butterflies. Butterflies need a certain amount of warmth



‘Tailed Emperor’ *Polyura sempronius* photo: L.Hunt

before they can become active. As soon as they are mobile they will search for the warmest, (not hot), sheltered spot to bask in the sunshine and then find a nectar source for refuelling. They are guided to the nectar source by scent and certain bright colours.

To be useful to butterflies, gardens have to be designed with an abundance of nectar plants, spread out around the garden. A single plant may become too crowded, as they all end up on the same bush. Butterflies like to patrol an area, flitting from plant to plant or circling small open areas among trees. Another haunt of butterflies is the sunny shallow soak or mud patch, and also warm stones and rocks in sheltered places.

Plants that attract butterflies

Butterflies generally favour plants that have small multiple or composite flowers such as daisies and everlastings. It has been observed that where a native Australian plant is available butterflies prefer these plants over introduced plants.

Some native flowering plants include:
(Scientific names are in italics)

Christmas Bush (*Bursaria spinosa*) with white flowers; **Rice Flowers** (*Pimelea*); **Native Verbines** (*Cullen* or *Psoralea*); **Creeping Boobialla** (*Myoporum parvifolium*); **Everlasting Daisies** (*Bracteantha* and *Chrysocephalum*); **Scaevola**; **Goodenia**, **Hakea**; **Emu bush** (*Eremophila* sp); **Tea Tree** (*Leptospermum*); **Wattle** (*Acacia*); **Bottlebrush** (*Callistemon* and *Melaleuca*); prostrate flowering **Eucalypts** (suitable for small gardens); **Vittadenia** daisies which has an abundance of composite purple flowers; **Native Lilac** (*Hardenbergia violacea*); **Running postman** (*Kennedia prostrata*) ground cover with red flowers and **bush peas** (*Pultenaea*).

The following are some exotic plants that attract butterflies to the Australian garden.

Buddleia species are the most famous throughout the world for attracting butterflies, hence the common name “Butterfly Bush”. *Buddleia davidii* and cultivars (pink, purple and white) are the best. Other buddleias are *B. alternifolia*, *B. weyerana* (cream), *B. globosa* (yellow).

Verbena either as annuals or perennials, have really bright colours (some are weeds).

Lavenders however *Lavendula stoechas* and its cultivars (Topped or Italian Lavender) is an invasive plant and should be avoided. Hybrid / non-seed setting species are suggested.

Hebe or **Veronicas** with its many varieties and colours are hardy plants used as a hedge.

Lantana, is a pest in the tropics, however butterflies love them especially pink flowers.

Salvia is plentiful as there are different types.

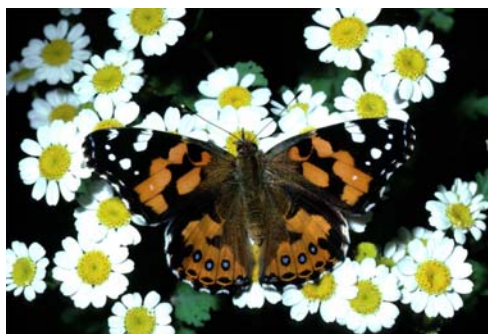
Phlox are for cooler areas.

Pentas in warmer areas.

Clover in lawns will attract small blue butterflies, as will **Lucerne** and **small pea flowers**.

Borage and **Heliotrope** can attract the Wanderer and Lesser Wanderer butterflies.

Sedum which is a freely flowering succulent. Keep in pots, easy to grow.



‘Painted lady’ *Vanessa kershawi* photo: RHFisher

BUTTERFLY
CONSERVATION
SA Inc.

C/- SA MUSEUM,
North Terrace,
ADELAIDE. 5000
S.AUSTRALIA

Compositae (daisy) plants include:

Annuals such as **Ageratum** and ***Erigeron** a garden fleabane which attracts skippers; **Stokesia** a small herbaceous perennial with mauve flowers; **Dandelions** grow well in abandoned lawns. **Arctotis**, **Aster**, **Osteospermum** and **Zinnia**.

Breeding garden butterflies

Butterflies need host plants to survive. These are the plants on which eggs are laid and caterpillars feed. They are not usually the nectar plants required by adult butterflies. Many larvae use native grasses and sedges, mistletoe, or citrus and milkweed plants on which to feed.

What plants currently occur in your garden, property, road reserve, park or conservation reserve? Make a list of the plants including grasses, herbaceous plants, bushes and trees.

Observe what butterflies feed on the plants currently occurring in your garden and research what butterflies have been known to occur in your locality in the past. Find out what the requirements are for these butterflies to survive as a larva and as an adult?

Plan how to retain existing vegetation, (fencing it off from animals if necessary) and make a list of the local providence butterfly host plants you could re-introduce to your property or reserve. Use alternatives to pesticides and talk to neighbours about reducing their pesticide use.

Host-plants of urban butterflies

Some of the common urban butterflies and their host plants are listed below. The plants marked with * are introduced species and invasive in the Adelaide area. Scientific names are in italics.

For more details of butterfly host plants including butterfly images consult Roger Grund's website – 'Butterflies of South Australia'.

Orange Palm-dart (*Cephenes augiades*): palms.
Southern Grass-dart (*Ocybadistes walkeri*) and **White-banded Grass-dart** (*Taractrocera papyria*): leafy native and introduced grasses (that remain green over summer) growing in moist areas including rice grass (*Microlaena*) spear grasses (*Austrostipa*) and tussock grasses (*Poa* sp.).

Dingy Swallowtail (*Papilio anactus*): citrus trees, particularly lemons and oranges.

Cabbage White (*Pieris rapae*): plants containing mustard oils such as nasturtiums.

Common Xenica (*Geitoneura klugii*) and **Common Brown** (*Heteronympha merope*): leafy introduced and native grasses including kangaroo grass (*Themeda triandra*), wallaby grass (*Austroanthonia* sp.) and tussock grass (*Poa* sp.).

Tailed Emperor (*Polyura sempronius*): eastern states trees including Kurrajong and Illawarra Flame tree.

Meadow Argus (*Junonia villida*): Herbaceous plants such as *Goodenia* and *Scaevola*.

Australian Painted Lady (*Vanessa kershawi*): Compositae plants such as everlasting daisies (*Chrysocephalum semipapposum* and *Bracteantha bracteatum*).

Australian Admiral (*Vanessa itea*): plants of the nettle family (*Parietaria* sp.) the scrub nettle (*Urtica incisa*), *stinging nettles, baby's tears and pellitory.

Wanderer (*Danaus plexippus*) and **Lesser Wanderer** (*Danaus chrysippus*): milk-weed plants including the swan plant and *cotton-bushes. Native hosts for the latter are the native pears (*Cynanchum* and *Marsdenia*).

Long-tailed Pea-blue (*Lampides boeticus*): native and introduced pea-plants including birdflower bushes (*Crotalaria*), scarlet runner (*Kennedia*), native verbines (*Cullen*), bush-peas, Sturt's desert pea, cockies tongue (*Templetonia*), Tall scurf pea (*Cullen australasicum* and Austral Trefoil (*Lotus australis*).

Common Grass-blue (*Zizina labradus*): native and introduced pea-plants including bush-peas, native verbines (*Cullen* or *Psoralea*) and native lilac (*Hardenbergia*).

Bitterbush Blue (*Theclinesthes albocincta*): bitterbush (*Adriana quadripartita* var. *klotzchii*) in coastal areas only. Male plants are best.

Saltbush Blue (*Theclinesthes serpentata*): salt bushes (*Atriplex* and *Rhagodia*).

Caper White (*Belenois java*) Caper bush (*Capparis* sp.).

Further information

South Australian butterflies website—contains comprehensive list of SA butterflies and their host plants. Regional lists also included.

<http://www.chariot.net.au/~rgrund/index.htm>

Butterfly Conservation SA Inc. Newsletters

Butterfly Gardening, Butterfly Conservation 1991-Tim New

How to attract Butterflies to your Garden - Densy Clyne

Butterflies of South Australian 1978 - R.H.Fisher Available from Libraries (out of print)

The complete field guide to Butterflies of Australia 2004 - M.Braby

BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION SA Inc.

is a non-profit organisation comprised of individuals interested in the conservation of butterflies and their habitats.

Anyone may join. Membership is \$10 per annum payable on 1st July each year.

Several newsletters are produced each year. Newsletter articles promote the conservation of butterflies and include information on how you can help to preserve their native habitat.

