

# Butterflies Go Native in your Garden!

Native plants and native butterflies evolved together so native plant aficionados may already have an unintentional butterfly garden! Indeed, ONLY native plants are allowed for garden certification by NABA (North American Butterfly Association). Butterfly gardening is especially rewarding in the Kansas City area because we are at the intersection of two major habitats: the eastern deciduous forests and the Midwestern prairies. The resulting diversity of native plants supports over 30 species of large, tropical-looking butterflies plus the charming Skippers and Flower Moths.

Many native gardens focus on shade-loving woodland plants, but butterflies are cold-blooded and must have the sun's heat to fuel their short life of love. Most nectar-rich flowers also need the sun to bloom. However, if you can forgo insecticides and have a sunny area, then you are well on your way to butterfly gardening success.

## Integrate a Butterfly Garden into Your Existing Space

Do not bother to create a new garden because your native flowers are already meeting the needs of adult butterflies. Just provide blooms from March to October. Early native bloomers include Rose Verbena, Columbines and Beebalm. In summer, Milkweeds are important sources of nectar for many pollinators. Other favorites include Partridge Pea, Clovers, Wild Senna, and Indigo Bush. Nectar is especially important in fall for migrating butterflies, including Monarchs, Painted Ladies and Sulphurs. Our native Asters, Sunflowers and Salvias offer the power drinks that fuel these journeys to warmer climates. If you are including ornamental flowers among your natives, be cautious about hybrids, which are bred for size and color but may be sterile and lack nectar. They are as useless as plastic flowers to butterflies and other pollinators!

## The Secret to Success: Loving and Feeding Caterpillars

If all you offer are flowers, then you are merely a low-life nectar bar serving only adult beverages. Planting more flowers will not bring more species and numbers of butterflies. No, you must plant to feed the children, the caterpillars. Unlike adults that can sip nectar from many species of flowers, most species of butterfly caterpillars eat a very specific plant leaf. For instance, the only food a Zebra Swallowtail caterpillar can eat is Paw-Paw leaves. No Paw-Paws, no Zebras. You choose which butterflies are in your garden by planting the specific caterpillar foods. Pregnant female butterflies will find your host plants, lay their eggs and establish resident populations. Best of all, many native caterpillar food plants are also beautiful and meet the needs of both gardeners and caterpillars. The following page provides a list of native host plants matched to butterfly species. For example:

### Milkweeds

Enjoy Monarchs in your garden from April to October by planting members of the Milkweed family, which are the only food for Monarch caterpillars. The best choice for a garden is our native pink Swamp Milkweed, *Asclepias incarnata*, with its refined appearance and behavior. If you want a low-growing border plant, the cream and purple flowered Spider Milkweed, *Asclepias viridis*, grows only a foot tall as it blooms in May. The white flowered Whorled Milkweed, *Asclepias verticillata*, also remains civilized in contrast to the coarse Common Milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca*, which shamelessly spreads by seeds and suckers. Consider Orange Butterfly Weed, *Asclepias tuberosa*, to be merely a nectar plant because Monarch caterpillars do not like its leathery leaves and eat it only as a last resort.

### Golden Alexanders.

Black Swallowtails are very common in our area because their caterpillars eat members of the Carrot family such as Queen Anne's Lace, Dill, Carrots, Fennel and Parsley. There are several weedy-looking native hosts, but our native prairie plant, Golden Alexanders, *Zizia aurea*, pleases both gardeners and Black Swallowtails. Its leathery dark green leaves are reminiscent of a sun-loving Helleborus and the golden flowers bloom periodically from April to September. Like fellow members of the carrot family, Golden Alexanders prolifically self-seeds and should be dead-headed once you have enough plants for you and your friends.

### Hoptree

A small tree of the understory, *Ptelia trifoliata* is also known as Stinking Ash and Wafer tree. This beautiful fragrant member of the Citrus family fits perfectly suited in a semi-shaded moist woodland garden and hosts both Tiger and Giant Swallowtails. Additionally, birds relish the winged wafer-like seeds. If space is limited, you can grow it as a 4 foot shrub by whacking it to the ground every February. Use this practice on other tree host plants that would otherwise quickly outgrow their allotted space and shade the yard.

## A Safer, More Beautiful World

By following a few simple guidelines, you make the world more beautiful by becoming a butterfly gardener. Just remember:

- No insecticides
- Full-sun
- Caterpillar Food Plants
- Nectar-rich flowers from March to October

You will be rewarded by the flying flowers who call your yard their home.

# Kansas Native Caterpillar Food Plants

English Name	Botanical Name	Family	Ht	Flower/ Nectar?	Foodplant for	Growing Hints/ Comments
Little Bluestem	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	Grass	2'	NA	Common Wood Nymph & Skippers	KANSAS STATE GRASS Beautiful clumping grass for the garden
Wooly Pipevine	<i>Aristolochia tomentosa</i>	Pipevine	Large vine	beige	Pipevine Swallowtail	Needs stout fence or trellis. Self-sows & suckers (which is good! The cats keep those suckers trimmed. )
Passionflower	<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	Passionflower	Large Vine	Blue	Gulf & Variegated Fritillaries	Amazingly beautiful flowers but a suckering thug.
Paw-Paw	<i>Asimina triloba</i>	Custard-apple	15'	maroon	Zebra Swallowtail	Small trees of the understory. Moist soil & partial shade
Hop Tree	<i>Ptelea trifoliata</i>	Citrus	20'	Greenish	Tiger & Giant Swallowtail	
Prickly Ash	<i>Zanthoxylum Americana</i>		15'	Greenish	Giant Swallowtail	
Spice Bush	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	Laurel	10'	Pale yellow	Spice Bush Swallowtail	
Sassafras	<i>Sassafras albidum</i>					
Tulip Tree	<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	Magnolia	80'	Cream & orange	Tiger Swallowtail	Magnificent tree. Prefers rich, moist soil. I keep mine trimmed to 6' high.
Black Cherry	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	Rose	60'	White	Tiger ST, Red-spotted Purple	The dark red cherries are sour, but eaten by birds. Self-seeds
Hackberry	<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	Elm	50'	Greenish	Hackberry, Tawny, Snout, Question Mark	Self-seeds like crazy!
<b>HERBACEOUS PLANTS</b>						
Milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca Incarnata &amp; tuberosa &amp; viridis &amp; verticillata, etc</i>	Milkweed	8" to 5'	White, Pinks, orange & reds YES Nectar!	Monarch	The MUST-HAVE for a butterfly garden or habitat
Golden Alexanders	<i>Zizia aureus</i>	Carrot	18"	Yellow	Black swallowtails	Likes moist soil & full sun. Self-seeds
Goatweed	<i>Croton monanthogynus</i>	Euphorbia	10"	Whitish (tiny)	Goatweed Leafwing	An annual that vigorously self-seeds. A delightful lemony fragrance
Cassia species	<i>Cassia marilandica &amp; Chamaecrista fasciculata</i>	Pea	m-4' f-12"	Bright yellow YES Nectar!	Sulfurs	Full sun & dry, gravelly soil. Deadhead to avoid too much self-seeding
Indigo Bush	<i>Amorpha fruticosa</i>		8'	Violet	Silver-spotted Skipper, Hairstreaks & Sulfurs	Wetlands, water's edge
	<i>Amorpha nana (Dwarf)</i>		12"	YES Nectar!		Dry Prairies
Pussytoes	<i>Antennaria parlinii &amp; A., neglecta</i>	Aster	12"	White	American Lady	Low-growing silvery ground cover
Violets	<i>Viola sp.</i>	Violet	6"	various	Fritillaries	Secretive cats, but large spectacular butterflies
Wild Petunia	<i>Ruellia humilis</i>	Acanthus	12"	Pale lavender	Buckeye	Dry prairies
Evening Primrose	<i>Oenothera biennis</i>	Evening Primrose		Yellow YES Nectar!	White-lined Sphinx Moth	Biennial
False Nettle	<i>Boehmeria cylindrica</i>	Nettle	3'	Greenish	Red Admiral, Comma, Question Mark	Non-stinging nettle Cats form rolled leaf nests
<b>ADDITIONAL NATIVE TREE CAT FOODS</b>						
Willows	<i>Salix nigra</i>	Willow	80'	Greenish	Viceroy, Tiger Swallowtail	Close proximity of native trees greatly increases the variety and density of butterfly populations. I grow many of these in my butterfly garden by whacking them to the ground every March. Thus, they remain short bushes and I can see the caterpillars without climbing on a ladder.
Ash	<i>Fraxinus americana</i>	Olive	100'	Greenish	Tiger Swallowtail	
Wild Plums	<i>Prunus sp</i>	Rose	6-10'	Pale Pink	Red-spotted Purple	
Black Oak	<i>Quercus nigra</i>	Beech	25'	Greenish	Banded Hairstreaks	
E.Red Cedar	<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>	Pine	50'	NA	Juniper Hairstreak	

# “Gotta Have” References

- Betsy Betros: Photographic Guide to Butterflies in the KC Region
- Alan Branhagen: The Gardener’s Butterfly Book
- David Wagner: Caterpillars of Eastern North America
- Douglas Tallamy: Bringing Nature Home



## Butterfly Organizations

- Monarch Watch (in Lawrence, KS)  
[www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org)
- North American Butterfly Association  
[www.naba.org](http://www.naba.org)
- Our KC-area Butterfly Club  
[www.idaliasociety.org](http://www.idaliasociety.org)



Regal Fritillary, *Speyeria idalia*, our namesake



## Native Plant Resources

Information: Kansas Native Plant Society  
[www.KansasNativePlantSociety.org](http://www.KansasNativePlantSociety.org)



Identification: Kansas Wildflowers & Grasses, compiled by K-State  
[www.kswildflower.org](http://www.kswildflower.org)



Purchase: Missouri Wildflowers Nursery  
Jefferson City, MO  
[www.mowildflowers.net](http://www.mowildflowers.net)



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