

August 19, 2020



Photo courtesy of Butterfly Lady.com

HELP SAVE THE BUTTERFLIES!

by Laurel Rady

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Butterflies are rapidly losing their habitat due to increased construction, chemical use, and the depletion of natural resources. Many of us are trying to help the butterflies by growing plants that provide food for all four stages of butterfly development (egg, larva, pupa, and adult). But even gardens that offer host and nectar plants for spring, summer and fall may not be attracting a lot of butterflies. Here are two additional ways of bringing butterflies to the garden -- by creating a butterfly puddler and a feeder dish. They are easy to make, safe for the butterflies, and can be assembled quickly for just a few dollars.

BUTTERFLY PUDDLER

Butterflies gather nutrients, minerals, salt and amino acids from the fluid present on wet soil, sand, and rotting plant matter. Male butterflies particularly benefit from this liquid uptake. The nutrients are transferred to female butterflies during mating and help increase the survival of butterfly eggs. A butterfly puddler can provide vital nutrition, attract more butterflies to the garden, provide them with a place to feed and rest, and help keep the butterfly population thriving.

There are many varieties of puddlers. The version described here uses natural beach sand, organic manure, organic sea salt, water, and some smooth rocks. Because butterflies are extremely sensitive to toxins, it is essential that all ingredients are natural, with no additives, chemicals, artificial colors, or fragrances. The components can be purchased online or, in many cases, at your local garden store.

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Use a shallow dish or birdbath. It can be made of clay, glass, metal, or plastic (at least 16 inches in diameter). It can be placed on the ground, a wall or flat rock or glued to a stable pedestal, such as an overturned bucket or flowerpot. Locate the puddler in the shade, near flowers that butterflies prefer. This will keep it from getting too hot and make it easy for butterflies to find.

Wearing garden gloves, pour sand almost to the edge of the dish. Add a handful of organic manure and mix it well into the sand. Sprinkle half a handful of organic sea salt on top. Add smooth pebbles (two to three inches long) for resting spots. Slowly pour water into the sand until it is damp (but not with pooled water). Keep the sand damp by adding water when needed and sprinkle a bit of organic sea salt on top every few weeks.

FEEDER DISH

Some butterflies need overripe fruit in addition to (or instead of) flower nectar to feed on. They are partial to sliced, rotting apples, bananas, nectarines, oranges, peaches, strawberries, and watermelon. This is a great way to make use of fruit that might otherwise be thrown away. The feeder dish is quick and easy to make. Stack a few paper or plastic plates together to form a sturdy unit. Punch four holes at the 12-, 3-, 6- and 9-o'clock positions, one to two inches from the edge. Cut two pieces of rope, each about 36" long, and tie each end securely to opposite holes in the feeder (connect 12 to 6 and connect 3 to 9). Place one or two clean saucers or plastic lids, two to three inches in diameter, in the feeder. Hang the feeder dish on a sturdy tree branch, preferably in a shady spot, about four feet off the ground. Place the sliced fruit into the lids or saucers. It is important to keep the feeder dish clean and free of mold, especially during hot summer weather. It is possible that the fruit will attract birds, ants, bees, and wasps. You may wish to remove the fruit in the evening, to avoid attracting unwanted pests.

Some feeders use cooked sugar water (or kitchen sponges saturated with it). But commercial sponges contain chemicals; sugar water produces bacteria and mold in hot weather; and butterfly wings and legs can stick together when covered with it, so this is not recommended.

Once these projects are complete, sit back and see what happens! It may take a few days for butterflies to discover these treats -- but once they do, you will be rewarded with the gentle, languid gliding of colorful, happy butterflies; and the satisfaction of knowing you are doing your part to give them a future.

And please join us for a two-part Zoom class on Fall and Winter Vegetables!

Would you like to harvest luscious home-grown vegetables even after the heat of summer subsides? If so, now is the time to plant for a fall and winter harvest. Learn how to grow a successful winter vegetable garden in this popular class with Master Gardener Zack Dowell. When: Aug 22, and Sept 5, 2020 09:00 to 10:30 AM.

Register in advance for this meeting (You only need to register once for parts 1 and 2).

<https://ucanr.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlIdOyrqjwpEtLj-gOmm4IuUqi8BBrEwgJz>.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

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Currently we are in phase 2 resumption of activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Master Gardener events will for the foreseeable future be limited. Please see our calendar of events for learning opportunities. We realize our public classes are valued by county residents and we especially appreciate your continued support and understanding during this public health challenge.

We do have some good news: the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, is open to the public, from 9 AM to noon on Fridays and Saturdays. State and county public health guidelines require us to limit visitors to ten at a time (including our docents) and ask that they practice social distancing and wear face coverings. Restrooms will not be open. Check http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information.

Have a gardening question? Master Gardeners are working hard remotely and can still answer your questions. Leave a message on our office telephone: 530-621-5512, or use the “Ask a Master Gardener” option on our website: mgeldorado.ucanr.edu. We’ll get back to you! Master Gardeners are also on Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Stay safe and follow recommended health and sanitation practices in the coming weeks.

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news.