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Butterfly Conservation Ireland
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Gardening for Butterflies

We can do much to conserve butterflies, moths and other wildlife in our gardens. With our butterfly and moth species in decline active conservation in our private gardens and in our public spaces can make a real difference for many species.

What Can Be Done?

Even the smallest garden has the potential to become an important habitat for wildlife. Most of our general countryside butterflies and moths are quite mobile and you stand a good chance of attracting them into your patch of the outdoors if you manage your garden in more wildlife friendly ways.



Peacock butterflies visit wildlife-friendly gardens

Butterfly Border

A simple but effective way to start is to plant nectar-rich flowering plants and shrubs in a sunny, sheltered part of your garden. Attractive shrubs include Butterfly Bush [*Buddleja davidii*] and hebes [*Hebe* spp], while Lavender [*Lavandula angustifolia*], Verbena [*Verbena bonariensis*], Ice Plant [*Sedum spectabile*], Marjoram [*Origanum vulgare*], thyme [*Thymus* spp] Michelmas Daisy [*Aster novae-belgii*] and Grape Hyacinth [*Muscari neglectum*] will attract butterflies sometimes in remarkable numbers.

Butterfly Conservation Ireland



Gardening for Butterflies



Saving our Heritage

Wetland Meadow

Create a wetland beside a pond or as a stand-alone habitat by excavating an area of soil, laying a pond liner in the excavated area and in filling the liner with the excavated soil. Planting this area with wetland wild flowers such as Lady's Smock [*Cardamine pratensis*], Water-mint [*Mentha aquatica*], Fleabane [*Pulicaria dysenterica*], Water-cress [*Nasturtium officinale*], Devil's-bit Scabious [*Succisa praetensis*], Purple Loosestrife [*Lythrum salicaria*] will be of great benefit to wildlife including butterflies and moths.

Wildflower Meadow

A wildflower meadow is a highly rewarding project that can produce a habitat in which butterflies and moths can feed and breed. Before deciding to create a wildflower meadow, allow a sunny part of your lawn to grow long and see what happens. You may be surprised to see wild flowers appear. A meadow can be created by removing the top 15cm of top soil and using it to build up a bank on which to plant your native hedgerow. Break up the subsoil. The best time to do this work is August – early October.

When the soil is fine and crumbly sow native wild flower seed. Seed can be sourced from suppliers or you can gather your own. Sow fresh local seed as this is more likely to thrive in your garden. Mix seed with dry sand and sow by throwing handfuls here and there as desired. Walk over the area to bring seed into contact with the soil. For most garden soils try a wild flower seed mix consisting of the following: Common Knapweed [*Centaurea nigra*], Field Scabious [*Knautia arvensis*], Devil's-bit Scabious, Wild Carrot [*Daucus carota*], Common Bird's-foot-trefoil [*Lotus corniculatus*], Red Clover [*Trifolium pratense*], Selfheal [*Prunella vulgaris*], Lady's Smock, Ox-eye Daisy [*Leucanthemum vulgare*], Black Medic [*Medicago lupulina*], hawkbits [*Leontodon* spp], hawk's-beards [*Crepis* spp], Common Dandelion [*Taraxacum officinale*], Yellow Rattle [*Rhinanthus minor*], Cowslip [*Primula veris*] and Primrose [*Primula vulgaris*]. These will provide colour and attract butterflies from March to October.



Wild flower meadow

Cut the meadow at no lower than a 10cm setting until mid-May and allow some of the meadow to flower all summer. Continue to cut some areas on a 10cm setting to vary sward heights to attract a range of species. In late September mow or strim the meadow and remove all cuttings to the compost heap to maintain low fertility. Leave some patches uncut as they will provide refuge for insects, butterfly larvae and eggs. Some soil disturbance will be useful for seed germination.

Top Butterfly Garden Tips

Water flowers in hot weather to increase nectar release.

Spray bare soil with water during hot weather; butterflies will drink the dissolved mineral salts.

Never use peat in your garden. This destroys irreplaceable wild habitats.

Do not apply fertiliser or insecticides. These damage habitats and wild life.

Grow female Holly [*Ilex aquifolium*] in full sun for Holly Blue butterflies to lay their eggs on in spring.

Grow native plants; these are generally best for butterflies.

Place potted flowers in full sun.



Red Admirals can be attracted to your garden.

Common Nettles growing in a sunny position are the food plant for several butterflies and moths.

Cut some nettles in June to create nutritious re-growth used by species breeding in late summer.

A garden shed with the door or window left open in September/October will attract Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies and Herald moths seeking hibernacula. Ensure that they can leave in spring.

Leave over-ripe plums for Red Admirals to feast on. Leave leaf litter as caterpillar shelters.

Plant a species-rich native hedgerow and leave uncut until winter.

Grow native woodland. Even a small wood containing small trees like Rowan [*Sorbus aucuparia*] and native Holly, Hazel [*Corylus avellana*], and Guelder Rose [*Viburnum opulus*] will provide for a range of wildlife.

A pond stocked with native water plants will add even more value and interest.

Record your garden butterflies using the National Garden Butterfly Survey available from **Butterfly Conservation Ireland**. See:

<https://butterflyconservation.ie/wp/> for more information on gardening for butterflies.