

What's in your garden?

For the April 2011 edition I'm going back to basics to look at how we can attract all manner of insects to our gardens over the coming months. Whether it's the plants you can choose or the homes you can create for butterflies, bees and other insects read on for some Spring and Summer inspiration.

What should I think about planting and why?

Butterflies and other insects need warmth to be active and fly, and they need to drink nectar from flowers for energy. Early flowers like pansy, aubretia, primrose and wallflowers all offer an early drink to those first emerging butterflies, bees and ladybirds. Whether you have a large garden or containers, pots and window boxes there are a whole host of nectar rich plants you can enjoy.



1. Asters will provide loads of autumn food for butterflies. They come in many colours to suit your tastes and can be grown in containers. Other open, flat flowers such as calendula and helenium are great for bees as well as pincushion shaped flowers like teasel, cardoon and valerian.
2. Buddleia whose common name is the butterfly bush. Prune hard in the spring and it will produce more flowers for you. It will grow almost anywhere in any soil.
3. Sedum, the Ice Plant, with late summer and autumn nectar is lovely but doesn't like wet soils and won't tolerate shade. For late nectar consider heathers and other heath plants (Erica)
4. Plant lavender in April and cut back flowers once they have gone over. A real favourite for butterflies. Why not try catmint and verbena?
5. Why not add some Oregano to your herb pots? A perennial herb that our butterfly friends can't get enough of. Fantastic edging pathways with its beautiful pink and purple flowers. In addition try some marjoram and thyme.
6. For a wilder look think about cuckooflower, alder blackthorn, nettles and garlic mustard, all great for caterpillars.

How can I get the children involved?



Why not challenge the children to build their own insect house? As always the BBC breathing places website is crammed with ideas.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/breathingplaces/bug_home/

Or for fun fact sheets including spotting the first signs of Spring and 'minibeast' hunts log on to nature detectives at:

http://www.naturedetectives.org.uk/download/hunt_spring_early.htm