# Attracting Butterflies

**—by Dennis St. John**

Some butterflies prefer to nectar at deep-throated flowers (eg lilac) others prefer shallow ones (eg alyssum). Low growing and taller plants cater to butterflies with different foraging height preferences. Some plants may be wonderful nectar sources when in flower, but have a relatively short blooming period (lilac), while others may not be a favorite on any butterfly's menu but have a long blooming season (matronalis, yarrow). Nectar plants should be planted in massed clumps rather than scattered in the garden. Large floral displays are much more effective in attracting butterflies than isolated flowers. There are differences among flowers in nectar availability depending on time of day, and different species of butterflies may nectar at different times. In general, late morning is the best period to observe butterflies nectaring. Many butterflies like to visit moist soil to obtain both mineral nutrients and water. A wet patch will often be more popular than any flower if the area is dry.



If you have the luxury of choice of where to site your butterfly garden, the optimal placement would be sunny, sheltered from wind, with a source of soil moisture, and as close as possible to unmowed, natural vegetation. The caterpillars of many butterflies feed on grasses, or on other plants which grow in lawns and meadows. The females are attracted to the vegetation in lawns, but the caterpillars may not survive the combination of irrigation & mowing which the well-groomed lawn requires.

### Nectar Sources for Okanagan Butterflies
The plants on this list will provide a suitable nectar source for butterflies throughout the flight season. Plants are listed approximately in order of bloom.

### Early Spring
Heather (Erica species), Pussy Willow*

### Mid Spring
Basket-of-gold Alyssum, Money plant (Lunaria), Iberis, Grape Hyacinth (Muscaria sp),Oregon Grape* (Mahonia), Flowering cherries, Apricot & Plum blossoms

**Late Spring**
Hesperis Matronalis, Lilac, Sweet William, Buddleja alternifolia

**Summer**
Sumac, Butterfly bush (Buddleja davidii ++), Phlox (Phlox paniculata), Fleabanes*
(Erigeron species) Zinnia, Oregano

**Late Summer**
Russian sage (Perovski aatriplicifolia), Sedum Autumn Joy (Sedum spectabilis)

**Autumn**
Michaelmas Daisies (Aster species), Rabbit brush*

*** **Late spring thru fall** - Jupiter's Beard (Centranthus rubra) & Wallflower (Erysimum,
Cheiranthus)

**Host Plants (caterpillar food) for Butterflies**

- Hoelbell's Rockcress* (Sara's orangetip, whites & marbles)
- Tarragon* (oregon swallowtail)
- Fennel, Carrot, Dill (anise swallowtail)
- Chokecherry* (two-tailed tiger swallowtail, coral hairstreak)
- Willows* (western tiger swallowtail, mourning cloak, sylvan hairstreak, faunus
  anglewing, dreamy duskywing)
- Milkweed** (monarch)
- Alfalfa, domestic  clovers (sulphurs, Melissa blue, greenish blue)
- Thistles** (painted lady, pale & mylitta crescent spots)
- Hollyhock, Mallows (painted & west coast ladies, grey hairstreaks)
- Stinging nettle* (red admiral, Milbert's tortoiseshell, satyr anglewing, west coast lady)
- Native Lupine* (hairstreaks & blues, persius skipper)
- Parsnip-flowered buckwheat* (two blues, two hairstreaks, blue copper)
- Antelope-brush* (three hairstreaks)
- Buckbush Ceanothus velutinus (pacuvius skipper, spring azure, two hairstreaks,
  California tortoiseshell, pale swallowtail)

**\* native plants**
**\*\* also fine nectar plants for a variety of butterflies**
**\*\*\* longest bloom time.**
**++ The "nanhoensis" cultivars flower early enough to overlap with the blooming
period of B. alternifolia**