Planning, Planting, and Managing Your Butterfly and Pollinator Garden

By Jim Kessler

NATIVE PLANT SELECTION, LAYOUT GUIDELINES, AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR BUTTERFLY AND NATIVE POLLINATOR GARDENS

Step 1: Location. Choose an appropriate spot for your garden.

Step 2: Strategies to Create Positive Public Perception.

Before Planting: Consider public perception of your native garden planting before you begin. Discuss your native garden project with your neighbors before you start. Careful selection of attractive native wildflowers and grasses that are mostly 2’ or shorter can help keep the neighbors happy. Design your bed so that shorter flowers are visible from the edge or the front. Place taller plants in the middle or back. Filling spaces between groups of wildflowers with short native grasses can create a more formal garden appearance.

After Planting: To reduce the mature height of plants, you may use a weed trimmer to cut the plants to a height of one foot during late June or early July. This will cause wildflowers to bush out and bloom. Understand that prairie plants will produce seed and spread throughout the bed. If you want a manicured garden look, you will need to use a spade or a broad-leaf herbicide to eliminate errant plants. An alternative method is to clip spent flowers or trim them with a weed trimmer before they go to seed.

Step 3: Plant Selection. Determine whether your native garden will be in full sun to partial shade or full shade. Use the attached Native Plants for Urban Gardens charts to select plants that will bloom with a variety of colors continually from early spring until late fall. Include milkweeds to support Monarch Butterflies. Your local Extension service and county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NCRS) can often help you to determine what native species belong in your locality.

Step 4: Create Your Native Garden Map. Make a plant selection chart like the one below for your garden:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plant Code</th>
<th>Common &amp; Scientific Names</th>
<th>Flowering Period</th>
<th>Flower Color</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>No. of Plants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bu</td>
<td>Asclepias tuberosa</td>
<td>JJA</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>3’</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Butterfly Milkweed

Layout your garden on graph paper. Color code the individual groups of local native wildflower and grass species. Use design codes to show plant grouping locations. Use seed catalogs from native plant suppliers in your area or their websites.

Step 5: Development. Develop a price list for plants, and other costs to install the garden.

Step 6: Planting Your Native Garden. Purchase seedlings from area native plant suppliers. Avoid purchasing native plant cultivars from retailers (cultivars are plants you buy that have been propagated not from seed, but rather vegetatively – i.e. via plant cuttings). There is always the chance that they will not provide nectar and pollen for local pollinators. Spread shredded mulch two to three inches deep and plant seedlings through it. Plant seedlings of the same species together in groups to maximize the color intensity of blooms. Plant 1 to 1.5 plants per square foot of surface.
area. Eventually dense plant cover will shade out weeds. Plant the native garden during spring if possible. Water seedlings regularly through the first growing season. Summer plantings must be watered often.

**Step 7: Management.** Fill the spaces between plants with a two inch depth of shredded mulch annually for the first several years. Do not use Preen, landscape fabric, or fertilizer in your native garden. Use a weed trimmer on plants in late fall or early spring and rake off the dead material. **Commitment to watering and weeding is needed in the first year.** Use long-term management strategies from **Step 2** that meet your needs.

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