



FROM A GARDENING PERSPECTIVE...

## Butterflies in the Garden

By

Holly Hoover, Palo Pinto County Master Gardener

The typical gardener enjoys the passing of the seasons in the garden. Spring brings the renewal of life, beautiful blooms, leaves on the trees and hopefully, green grass.

I personally look forward to all of these things and more. The first butterfly of the season usually puts a smile on my face and joy in my heart. A love of butterflies was instilled in me as a child by my mother, and has grown into a passion as an adult. Watching them float around the garden can bring a sense of peace to most people even during the stressful times in life.

Butterflies begin their lives on what are called host plants. These plants are where the adult females will lay their eggs, each about the size of a pin-head, which will, in turn, hatch to become a very hungry, tiny caterpillar. The caterpillar will shed its skin five times within two weeks, each time allowing for growth. It will then seek a sheltered spot, sometimes as simple as the underside of a leaf, to shed its skin for the final time, to become a chrysalis. The

chrysalis stage lasts for almost another two weeks, after which the adult butterfly will emerge.

Encouraging butterflies into the garden is a fairly simple thing to do. Let's begin with their needs: food, water and shelter.

Some host plants that are common to this area of Texas include butterfly weed, passion vine, senna, Texas sage, most varieties of oak trees, red bud trees, parsley, dill and citrus.

After emerging from the chrysalis, the young butterfly is now looking for another type of plant called a nectar plant. This is where the butterfly will get most of the nutrients required for the duration of its lifespan, which in most butterflies is merely six weeks. Nectar plants tend to be more eye-catching than host plants, not only to butterflies, but to humans as well. Some examples of host plants for our area include Gregg's blue mistflower, lantana, Turk's cap, purple cone-flower, fall aster, Shasta daisy, Mexican mint marigold, and garden phlox.

Butterflies also gather essential minerals from the soil and rocks. Sometimes you will see them resting near a puddle or a patch of wet sand. This can serve two purposes, including, the need for minerals and the need for water.

The need for shelter is more than likely already served by the flowers, shrubs, and trees in your garden.

My favorite butterflies are the Monarch and the Queen. These two are very closely related, both with a deep rusty orange color dominant on their wings, bordered in black with small white dots in the black border. Monarchs have black veins or lines in each wing segment, visible when the wings are either opened or closed. Queens black veins are only on the underside of the wings. The host plant for both of these is the common milkweed. Their favorite nectar plant is Gregg's blue mistflower. Hundreds of butterflies

grace my yard yearly to enjoy the nectar from this lavender colored bloom.

Take some time to enjoy the small things...like the butterflies!

For more information about butterfly gardening contact the  
Palo Pinto  
County Extension Office 940-659-2588.