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CELEBRATE EARTH DAY WITH THE BUTTERFLIES!

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There is nothing more calming and enjoyable than walking through a colorful garden enlivened by the silent beauty of a butterfly's delicate wings fluttering from flower to flower. Butterflies are beautiful, yes, but they are also beneficial pollinators who help propagate our flowers, trees, and crops. Like many species, butterflies are suffering with a loss of habitat and pesticide use.

Here are five ways you can help the Earth by helping the butterflies!

1. Feed them by planting nectar plants

Nectar plants provide food for adult butterflies. Nom nom! Flowering perennials offer nectar for bees, moths, hummingbirds, and butterflies alike.

2. Give them a home by incorporating host plants

Host plants are special plants on which adult butterflies will lay their eggs and caterpillars will eat. Adult butterflies may visit many different nectar flowers in search of food, but their caterpillars are exceedingly particular when it comes to their host plants.

3. Choose their favorite flavors with native plants

Butterflies have selected plants for good nectar production, but human plant breeders select for color or long bloom season and may inadvertently select out important butterfly requirements. Also choose native varieties of host plants as generations of caterpillars have taste-tested them.

4. Don't be skimpy on the food

When you plant for caterpillars, you need to provide them with lots of food. They increase in size up to 1000 times from egg to final molt! If there isn't enough of the host plants, they will starve. Oh no!

5. Pay attention to flower size and bloom time

Butterflies need a perch to sit on while they sip so we recommend using flowers with a broad platform like purple coneflower and gaillardia, or clusters of small flowers like those found on the goldenrod. Butterflies will be trickling in through spring to late summer so remember to plant nectar flowers that will bloom at different times so you always have something for them to eat.

Good luck with your butterfly gardens! It may take some time for the butterflies to discover your sanctuary, but when they do they will appreciate your support.

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