

## A Butterfly Haven in Your Herb Garden

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Many common herbs are essential for successful reproduction of some of the exquisite butterflies that dart and swirl through Houston gardens. Creating an herbal butterfly sanctuary will help sustain and prepare butterflies to meet their tremendous survival challenges.

You can learn about "Herbal Life Support for Butterflies" at the [42nd Annual Herb Fair](#), Sat., Nov. 1, 9am-3pm, at the Metropolitan MultiService Center, 1475 W. Gray. This 12:30pm program for novice and experienced gardeners, children and all nature lovers will cover how to select the right combination of herbs to create a butterfly habitat so you can watch the entire life cycle unfold in your own garden.

A butterfly garden is an excellent introduction to backyard biology for children, and parents are particularly encouraged to attend.

A successful butterfly garden offers both:

- \* Nectar plants with flowers that provide a sugary liquid for adult butterflies
- \* Host plants that provide the massive amounts of leafy food for rapidly growing caterpillars.

Some herbs can be both nectar and host at the same time.

Most butterfly caterpillars are particular, if not inflexible, about food. The female must locate and lay eggs on specific plants. For example, Monarchs have evolved to lay eggs only on milkweed plants. As they feed, the caterpillars assimilate toxic substances from the milkweed that make themselves unpalatable to birds both as caterpillars and adults. No other host food is possible. But wild milkweed has become scarce in recent years due to development and agricultural use of pesticides. Thus, Monarchs depend more and more on gardener-created butterfly habitats in urban landscapes for their survival.



Left to right, dill, cilantro and fennel are sure to attract swallowtail butterflies.

Our graceful Eastern Black Swallowtail requires herbs from the Apiaceae family: parsley, dill, fennel, cilantro, and the less-known but lovely herbs chervil and lovage. Other butterflies that use herbs to survive and flourish in the Houston area will also be discussed in the presentation at the Herb Fair.

Adult butterflies are less particular about nectar sources. They can visit virtually any of the following flowering herbs in your garden for quick, high-energy nectar: almond verbena, basil, bee balm, borage, butterfly weed, calendula, catnip, chives, cilantro, dill, echinacea, fennel, hyssop, lavender, lemon balm, marjoram, mints, oregano, parsley, pinks, rosemary, sage (particularly pineapple sage), savory, thyme, and yarrow. These are all wonderful choices for a fragrant, varied herbal butterfly garden that will be a haven for you, too, as it attracts and supports one of nature's most dazzling creations.

An extensive collection of herbal butterfly-supporting plants will be available for purchase at the Nov. 1 Herb Fair. The Herb Society of America members will gladly share expertise with novice gardeners. Details [www.herbsociety-stu.org](http://www.herbsociety-stu.org).