



HOST the MOST *Butterflies*

Want to know the secret to getting butterflies to flock to your backyard? Fill your garden with not only the flowers but also the host plants that butterflies love.

This Kentucky couple goes the extra mile for their winged guests by hand-raising their eggs.

BY JUDI KETTELER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROB CARDILLO



TOP: Wayne and Christine Richards fill their backyard with plants that nourish butterflies and caterpillars. **BOTTOM:** What big eyes a Spicebush Swallowtail caterpillar has! Actually, these are false eyes that nature provided to scare predators. Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) leaves are its favorite food. **OPPOSITE:** A Pipevine Swallowtail sips nectar from a bloom of tall verberna, *Verberna bonariensis*.

A Red-Spotted Purple butterfly perches tentatively on Wayne Richards' palm. Just moments before, it had emerged from its chrysalis. The iridescent blue wings pump open and closed, drying and gathering strength for flight. Wayne coaxes this little guy to fly the way a proud dad cajoles his wobbly toddler to take its first steps. The butterfly is his baby, in a way, because he's cared for it since before it hatched from a tiny egg. "I've always loved butterflies," says Wayne, who is a co-author with his sister, Judy Burris, of *The Life Cycles of Butterflies* (Storey Publishing, 2006). "I love the idea of a creature that can start as one thing, and then become something completely different."

Nurturing butterflies is a hobby that Wayne enthusiastically shares with his wife, Christine. On any summer's day in their suburban Elsmere, Kentucky, backyard, the couple host as many as 35 different types of butterflies in various stages of their life cycle. Nectar plants lure the winged beauties in, and host



LEFT: Wayne gardens in raised beds which provide good drainage. Mulched paths and edging made with concrete pavers maintain a tidy appearance around plantings of cleome, bee balm, fennel, and milkweed. **BELOW:** Christine holds Zebra Swallowtail eggs and baby caterpillars. It will take another seven to 10 days for the caterpillars to grow to full size. **BOTTOM:** A Zebra Swallowtail feeds on milkweed, but it commonly lays eggs on the Pawpaw tree.

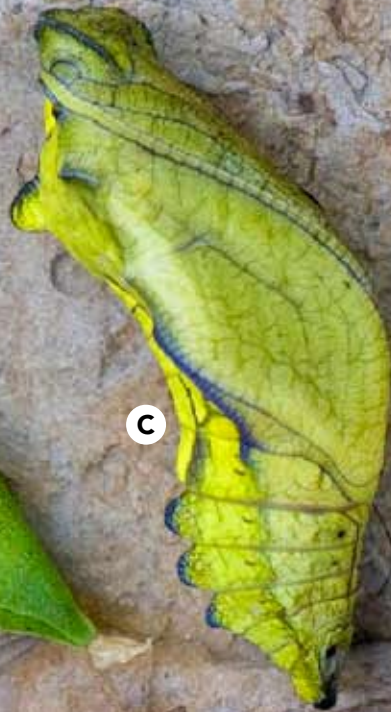


plants encourage them to linger and lay eggs. That's when Wayne and Christine step in and help Mother Nature with the parenting part. They carefully gather the eggs (with the host leaf still attached) and take them indoors to their butterfly nursery. Their safeguarding ensures most of the eggs will hatch into caterpillars. In the wild, only 1 in 100 will make it to butterfly stage, Wayne says. But because they watch over the whole life cycle—from egg to caterpillar to emergence from the cocoon—about 97 percent make it.

Each summer, Wayne and Christine guide 400–500 butterflies from egg to adulthood. That's a lot of mouths to feed. Caterpillars are hungry fellows, and they need fresh food daily. They're picky, too, eating only the leaves of certain plants. The best bet, Wayne says, is to give them the same plant their eggs were laid on. (See "Caterpillar Guide," page 57.)



When caterpillars reach their mature size, Wayne provides twigs for them to spin their chrysalises from and closely monitors their metamorphosis. When a butterfly is about to emerge, he takes the chrysalis, still attached to its twig, outside to watch it emerge. (A butterfly needs space to pump its wings, which dries and strengthens them.) "No matter how many times you see the process, it never gets old," he says.



A colorful medley of swallowtail butterfly cocoons:
A. Zebra, **B.** Spicebush,
C. Pipevine, and **D.** Eastern Black.



Creating a Butterfly Habitat

Plant species that caterpillars like, and the butterflies will not only come, they'll stay and lay eggs. Keep these tips in mind when you create a habitat for caterpillars and butterflies.

- **Plant both nectar and host plants.** Start with a couple of easy ones: fennel (the host plant for the Black Swallowtail, one of the easiest butterflies to attract) and *Lantana* (a nectar-rich flower that pleases a variety of butterflies).
- **Avoid using chemicals.** There's no place for pesticides in a butterfly garden. Loosen your view on weeds and tidiness. What many gardeners consider weeds are actually favorite caterpillar host plants.
- **Be a good host.** Remember, you're feeding hungry caterpillars. If you want enough fennel for yourself, for example, grow extra.
- **Stick with native plants whenever possible.** If you have trouble finding a host plant (such as pipevine), ask your local nursery to order it.

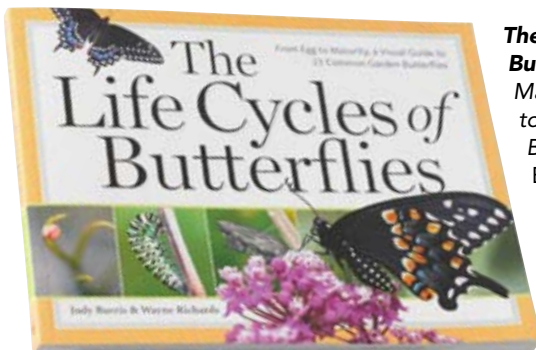


A Black Swallowtail
sips nectar from
Verbena bonariensis.

Wayne and Christine take a holistic approach to their butterfly garden. It's not as flashy, perhaps, as butterfly gardens that have only nectar-base flowering plants. "Butterflies need host plants, too, and they are extremely specific about what they'll lay eggs on," Wayne says. "It requires planting a lot of items that aren't very pretty." The Richardses intersperse flowers with plants that caterpillars dine on, such as milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.), prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*), false nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrical*), hops (*Humulus lupulus*), pawpaw tree (*Asimina triloba*), and pipevine (*Aristolochia tomentosa*). Some of these plants are considered weedy, if not invasive, but Wayne and Christine are meticulous about keeping them in check.

Like the butterflies they cater to, the Richardses have favorite flowers, including cleome, coneflower, bee balm, tall verbena, butterfly bush, and aster. But they keep these nectar-rich species in balance. "If you only plant nectar plants, you're just building a gas station," Wayne says. "The butterflies will stop by to fill up, but they're not going to stay because there is nothing else there for them." Milkweed may not be a looker, but the parade of Monarch butterflies that visit the garden and lay eggs on it more than make up for its gangly nature.

"Most people don't want to be as hardcore as me," Wayne says, acknowledging that he can spend hours a day on his hobby. "But you don't need to do much to get started," he says. "That's the beauty of gardening for butterflies. Plant the right stuff, and you can sit back and enjoy the show." 🌿



The Life Cycles of Butterflies: From Egg to Maturity, a Visual Guide to 23 Common Garden Butterflies by Judy Burris and Wayne Richards. Storey Publishing; 2006; \$16.95

To order a copy, call 800/441-5700.



Monarch

Milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.)
Look for pink swamp milkweed, 'Ice Ballet', blood flower, or orange butterfly weed.



Eastern Black Swallowtail

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and Dill (*Anthemum graveolens*)
They smell great and blend in well with other plantings.



Tiger Swallowtail

Sweet Bay Magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*)
Grows in sun or shade; has fragrant blooms in early summer.

Caterpillar Gallery

Butterflies instinctively know to lay eggs on plants their wiggly offspring will eat.
To attract the most variety in your garden, provide a buffet of host plants.



Common Buckeye

Snapdragon (*Antirrhinum majus*)
Widely available at nurseries; offered in a variety of colors.



Silvery Checkerspot

Coneflowers (*Echinacea* spp.)
Prolific perennial bloomer; also an excellent nectar plant.



Spicebush Swallowtail

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)
Grows in sun or shade; has a spicy smell when stems are cut.



Cabbage White

Cleome (*Cleome spinosa*)
Prolific self-seeder and drought-tolerant; white and pink flowers also attract hummingbirds.



Zebra Swallowtail

Pawpaw Tree (*Asimina triloba*)
Produces bananalike fruit (if you have two of them).



Red-Spotted Purple

Willow (*Salix* spp.)
Grows best in moist soils. Caterpillars will winter over in leaves.



For more on butterfly plants, go to [BHG.com/butterflyplants](https://www.bhg.com/butterflyplants).