

Butterfly Gardens: How to Make Butterfly Food and Butterfly Feeders



By Jane Lake

In addition to selective planting of flowers and shrubs, there are many simple ways to offer butterflies their food. These alternative butterfly food sources, like over-ripe fruit or home-made butterfly nectar, are called "attractants." Attractants will lure butterflies into your garden even if it isn't an ideal wild flower meadow.

Easy Butterfly Food

Butterflies use a variety of food sources to sustain them, including such tasty delights as over-ripe fruit and rotting vegetation. If you own an apple, plum, cherry or pear tree, simply allowing fallen fruit to ferment on the ground will create a favourite feeding spot for butterflies. Don't throw out those last bananas, mushy strawberries, too-soft peaches or nectarines, extra orange slices or left-over melon ends either! Instead, follow the directions below to make an easy butterfly feeder for fruit!

One inexpensive source of over-ripe fruit is the "fast sale" stand in the produce section of your grocery store; you might even get the produce manager to donate one or two unsaleable pieces of fruit if you explain the purpose.

Save extra bananas in the freezer - the skin will turn black and unsightly, but the mushy fruit that results when you defrost the bananas will delight many butterflies and moths.

Easy Butterfly Feeder for Fruit

A ceramic or glass pie plate, plastic or Terracotta plant saucer, or a dish with a sloping rim can all be used to make easy butterfly feeders. Suspend the plate with flower pot hangers or fashion a macramé style holder from household twine. You could wind the stems of silk or plastic flowers around the twine holder to decorate the butterfly feeder and make it visually appealing to butterflies.

Simply hang the feeder from the bough of a shady tree, in a spot where you can easily view visitors to the feeder. Try to place it a little higher than your highest flowers. Add slices of over-ripe fruit. You can sprinkle a little fruit juice or water over the fruit slices if they dry out too much - remember it's the mushy, rotting, very over-ripe fruit that butterflies like best. Replace the fruit if it dries out or becomes moldy.

Homemade Butterfly Nectar Recipe and Nectar Feeder

In *Butterfly Gardening in Containers*, released by Texas A & M University, Master Gardener Bobbie Truell says:

"An alternative food source for butterflies is a homemade feeder filled with a solution of 4 parts water to 1 part granulated sugar. Boil the solution for several minutes until sugar is dissolved, and then let cool. Serve the solution in a shallow container with an absorbent material such as paper towels saturated with the sugar solution. Bright yellow and orange kitchen scouring pads may be placed in the solution to attract butterflies and give them a resting place while they drink. Place the feeder among your nectar flowers on a post that's 4-6 inches higher than the tallest blooms. Extra solution can be stored in your refrigerator for up to a week."

Homemade Butterfly Jar Feeder for Nectar

You will need:

- a small glass jar with a lid that seals well
- a piece of cotton or other clean absorbent material
- home-made butterfly nectar (4 parts water to 1 part sugar, boiled and cooled)
- twine
- Optional decorations: yellow, orange or red plastic scouring pads; paint that will adhere to glass and sealer, or silk or plastic flowers

What You Do:

- Punch a small hole in the jar lid with an awl or a hammer and small nail.
- If you wish, insert a coloured kitchen scouring pad to provide an alluring splash of colour to attract the butterflies.
- Alternatively, decorate the outside of the jar with waterproof paint (simple, bold flower shapes would be ideal) then finish with clear sealer.
- Another decorative idea is to glue plastic or silk flowers to the outside of your jar.
- Screw the lid firmly onto the jar.
- Plug the hole with sponge, cotton, a length of candlewick or other absorbent material - you want this material to become saturated with nectar but not to drip, so make sure it plugs the hole tightly.
- Make a macramé style hanger from household twine.
- Invert the jar and hang it close to your flowers

