

Create a Butterfly Haven with Native Plants
By Maggie Lindley
UCCE El Dorado County Master Gardener

Did you know that California has an official State insect? It is the California Dogface butterfly. Although it is rarely seen in El Dorado County, there are many other kinds of butterflies that you can attract to your garden.

Creating a butterfly habitat generally involves planting two types of plants, host plants - the food for the butterfly larvae (caterpillars), and nectar plants for the adults (the butterflies). Many of the butterflies that are native to the El Dorado County area feed on California native plants found here or that you can grow in our soil and climate. Sometimes finding native plants can be challenging. Some local nurseries carry them or will order them for you. You may also find sources on the internet. The California Native Plant Society conducts plant sales twice a year. Find more information about this organization and their sales at www.eldoradocnps.org. Master Gardeners also offer a large selection of native plants at our annual spring and fall plant sales.

Nectar plants attract butterflies to your garden. If their host plant is available they may lay eggs on plants in your garden. Some butterfly nectar plants give you more “bang for the buck” by attracting a large variety of butterflies. Some examples are: *Apocynum cannabinum* (Dogbane), *Symphyotrichum chilensis* (Pacific or California aster), *Eriodictyon californicum* (Yerba Santa), and *Salvia*. (My favorites are 'Whirley Blue' and 'Poza Blue' sage, both crosses of *Salvia clevelandii* and *Salvia leucophylla*.) Three other important butterfly nectar plants are: *Eriogonum nudum* (naked buckwheat), *Eriogonum umbellatum* (sulphur buckwheat) and *Aquilegia formosa* (Western columbine). Plant several of these varieties to help attract an eye-catching assortment of butterflies.

Be sure to consider plants that will support butterfly larvae. Pacific asters are host plants for a variety of Checkerspot larvae. The Gary Hairstreak butterfly larva feeds on *Mondardella villosa* (coyote mint). *Anaphalis margaritacea* (pearly-everlasting) attracts the larvae of the flashy American Painted Lady, also known as the West Virginia Lady butterfly. *Ceanothus* species feed the larvae of the Pacuvius Dusky-Wing, the Spring Azure, and California Tortoiseshell butterflies. *Asclepias fascicularis* (narrowleaf milkweed) is the favored plant for the well-known Western Monarch larvae, famous for its incredible migration. Most of these plants attract other butterfly and beneficial insect larvae as well.

There are a few good nectar and larvae plant combinations. Coyote mint pairs up with *Lomatium utriculatum* (common lomatium) to support the life cycle of the Anise Swallowtail. Columbine and *Ceanothus* feed the Pale Swallowtail. Pacific asters (for nectar) and bush monkeyflower (*Mimulus aurantiacus*) feed the Common Buckeye larvae, a curious butterfly with several large "eyes" on its wings to confuse hungry birds. Dogbane and native sweet violets attract and feed a variety of fritillaries.

Native plants are adapted to our dry summers but young plants need mulch and water in the summer until they are established. During the hot summer months, water new plantings about once a week. Established plants need to be watered deeply about once a month. Plant a large

mass of a single plant variety (4 x 4 foot area) to make it easier for butterflies to locate your garden. Enjoy!

The next Master Gardener class will be on Saturday, May 12 and will cover Container Gardening. There is no charge for this 3-hour class which starts at 9 a.m. The class is held in the Veterans Memorial Building at 130 Placerville Dr. in Placerville.

Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9 a.m. to noon, by calling (530) 621-5512. Walk-ins are welcome. The office is located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. For more information about our public education classes and activities, go to our Master Gardener website at http://ucanr.org/sites/EDC_Master_Gardeners/. Sign up to receive our online notices and e-newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mgenews/>. You can also find us on Facebook.