

# Butterfly friendly gardens

Factsheet | July 2023

Having butterflies flitting about your garden can be a wonderful sight, and they also play important roles in the local ecosystem as pollinators and food source for wildlife.

## Butterflies of South Australia

South Australia is home to a unique array of butterflies, and it is believed that 54 permanent species once inhabited the state.

There has now been a total of 78 butterfly species recorded in South Australia, including the introduced monarch (*Danaus plexippus*), which is one of the most recognised species, and the lithochroa blue (*Jalmenus lithochroa*), which is found only in South Australia.

## Habitat

Butterflies can be extremely specific about habitat. So, even though the same plants may occur on the Adelaide Plains, some butterflies prefer the cooler climates of the Hills and will not breed elsewhere.

Some species are only found in wetland or coastal areas, others in dry mallee woodlands, or the moist woodland habitats of the Mount Lofty Ranges.

## Host plants

Female butterflies are selective in the plant species they choose to lay eggs on, and this will be different for each butterfly species. These plants are called 'host plants' and provide food for larvae (caterpillars) that hatch from the eggs. Some butterflies only have one plant species that they will lay their eggs on.

Planting host plants is the best way to support native butterflies and their caterpillars. Typical host plants include species of native grasses, daisies, wattles, and peas.

## Nectar plants

Butterflies benefit from, a variety of local native nectar-producing plants.



Meadow argus (Photo: Martin Stokes).

Incorporating these species within your garden, including a range of species to provide year-round nectar, can help entice butterflies into your patch. For example, local wattles (Acacia species), tall scurf-pea (*Cullen australasicum*), goodenias (*Goodenia* species) and fanflowers (*Scaevola* species). Butterflies have an acute sense of smell and will travel vast distances to reach the desired nectar plant.

Thought must also be given to where you put your butterfly garden. Position the key nectar producing plants where they will receive sun from mid-morning to mid-afternoon, which is the peak feeding time. Adult butterflies are rarely seen feeding in the shade.

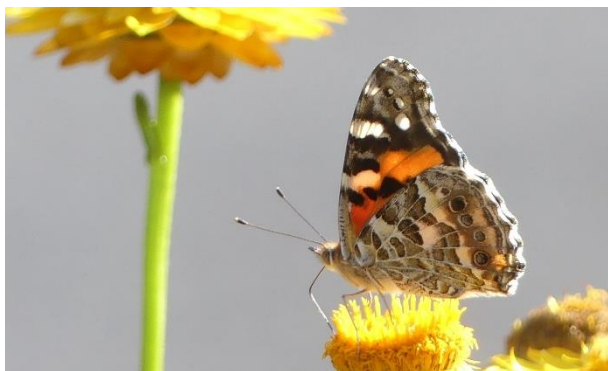
Group plants of the same species together so that they are more obvious to butterflies (e.g. clumps of native everlastings and bluebells make a striking wildflower show).

## Warmth and protection

Butterflies are unable to create their own body heat so rely on warmth from the sun to raise their body temperature and wings for flight. Incorporating flat stones in a sunny and well protected place into your garden will provide warmth and resting spots. Butterflies also require sun for orientation.

Butterflies require shelter from predators while feeding and laying eggs. Creating a diverse garden with plants of different heights provides the greatest protection.

Protection from the elements, like wind and rain, is also essential as their delicate wings can be easily ripped. Position tall plants accordingly to offer maximum protection from strong winds.



Australian painted lady (Photo: Matt Endacott).

## Water

Butterflies drink by 'puddling', a term given to sucking up fluids from mud and rotting organic matter. This provides butterflies with water, essential amino acids and salts critical for their health. Providing an area of bare ground, ideally in a wet part of the garden, will ensure a ready supply of water for local butterflies.

## Threats

Urban development has resulted in the loss of habitat for butterflies due to:

- clearance of native vegetation
- drainage of swamps
- overgrazing, mowing and trampling of grasslands
- inappropriate fire regimes
- use of insecticides.

Most butterflies are unable to adapt to the loss of their required host and nectar plants. Consequently, many species are either rare or threatened.

## Chemical use

Chemical use should be minimised in your garden to protect butterflies. Insecticides are lethal to all insects and should be eliminated if you want a butterfly friendly garden. Remember you need caterpillars to get butterflies!

## Top 5 tips

1. Grow plants native to your suburb.
2. Include plants for both butterflies and their caterpillars.
3. Plant species that are a range of heights.
4. Select a mix of local native plants to provide flowers throughout the year.
5. Minimise chemical use.

## 10 butterflies to support in your garden

Some people plant milkweed as a host plant for the Monarch butterfly, an introduced butterfly species. Plant Cullen instead, which will support conservation of the striking, locally native, Chequered Swallowtail butterfly.

### Butterfly

### Host plant

Common brown ( <i>Heteronympha merope merope</i> )	Kangaroo grass ( <i>Themeda triandra</i> )
Meadow argus ( <i>Junonia villida calybe</i> )	Pale fan-flower ( <i>Scaevola albida</i> )
Long-tailed pea blue ( <i>Lampides boeticus</i> )	Austral trefoil ( <i>Lotus australis</i> )
Two-spotted line-blue ( <i>Nacaduba biocellata biocellata</i> )	Golden wattle ( <i>Acacia pycnantha</i> )
Southern grass dart ( <i>Ocybadistes walkeri hypochlorus</i> )	Tussock-grass ( <i>Poa</i> sp.)
Chequered swallowtail ( <i>Papilio demoleus sthenelus</i> )	Tall scurf-pea ( <i>Cullen australasicum</i> )
White banded grass dart ( <i>Taractrocera papyria papyria</i> )	Weeping grass ( <i>Microlaena stipoides</i> .)
Saltbush blue ( <i>Theclinesthes serpentata serpentata</i> )	Berry salt bush ( <i>Atriplex semibacatta</i> )
Australian painted lady ( <i>Vanessa kershawi</i> )	Common everlasting ( <i>Chrysocephalum apiculatum</i> )
Common grass-blue ( <i>Zizina otis labradus</i> )	Native violet ( <i>Hardenbergia violacea</i> )

Scan to discover a list of native plant nurseries on the Green Adelaide website.



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