



Information Compiled by the Save Rani Bagh Botanical Garden Foundation

What is a Butterfly Garden? How can we establish one?

Some interesting facts about butterflies

A butterfly garden is a sunny patch with plants specifically selected to attract butterflies that are always on the lookout for food for themselves and their caterpillars. So, we need host plants that serve as larval food plants for caterpillars and plants whose flowers produce abundant nectar for the adult butterflies.

Each species of caterpillar has its own specific 'food plant' though 'nectar plants' are common to all. Many relish overripe and rotten fruit, so offering these can also be a simple addition to attract butterflies.

A 'mud-puddling' area with damp soil is useful for butterflies to 'mud puddle', a process by which they suck the salts from mud.

Pesticides are best avoided as they kill larvae and butterflies.

Go ahead and craft a butterfly garden in your neighbourhood garden, building compound or even a small balcony - all you need is a sunny patch with host plants and nectar-rich plants!

FASCINATING FACTS

Species diversity: There are around 18,000 species of butterflies worldwide of which 1,500 are found in the Indian subcontinent and 170 in Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park. V.J.B. Udyan and Zoo's botanical garden plays host to over 40 species, a remarkable figure considering that the whole of the United Kingdom has only 59 species!

Lifespan: Most adult butterflies live for a brief period ranging from 2-4 weeks; some large species may live even for 8 months.

Butterfly 'blood': Unlike vertebrates that have blood flowing through a closed circulatory system, insects like butterflies have a fluid called haemolymph that flows freely bathing all the internal tissues.

Sense organs: The taste and smell organs of a butterfly are found on its antennae and under its feet and it can even see ultraviolet light.

LIFE CYCLE OF A BUTTERFLY

Butterflies go through four very different stages in their life, a process known as Metamorphosis.

Egg: Using its sense of sight and smell the female butterfly locates the right species of plant on which to lay her eggs. The pin-head-sized eggs are glued onto leaf surfaces.

Larva or Caterpillar: As the caterpillar or larva emerges from the egg, its first meal is its own eggshell. Thereafter, it feeds on the leaves of the 'food plant' on which it is born. During this feeding-and-growing stage, the caterpillar sheds its skin and grows a new one four times. When fully grown, it stops feeding, anchors itself to a suitable perch and turns into a bag-like structure, the pupa.

Pupa or Chrysalis: The immobile pupa may appear lifeless, but many dramatic changes occur within its protective shell. The caterpillar tissues disintegrate and through an amazingly complex process of cell division, adult butterfly parts like wings, antennae, legs and so on are gradually formed.

Adult or Imago: After all the organs are fully formed within the pupa, a transformational process that usually lasts 8 to 15 days, the pupal skin splits open at the head and the adult butterfly emerges, rests a while for its wings to dry and harden before fluttering away to begin another life cycle and propagate.