



## How Many Host Plants?

By Jody Longhill

Like many native plant gardeners interested in butterflies, I started out by planting milkweed to attract the monarch butterfly. The more I learned about butterflies, however, the more I realized that I didn't have enough host plants or nectar plants to support them. I bought a butterfly book and began to research what the host plants were for different butterflies. I downloaded a list of Maryland native butterflies from the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. I also found lots of information from the National Wildlife Federation and the famous Mt. Cuba Center. What I learned made me rethink my whole garden!



When I first started planting native perennials to attract butterflies, I chose species under three feet and chose my favorite colors. I discovered through research that different butterflies nectar on plants that have different shapes, colors, sizes, and heights and rarely utilize the same host plant. I also learned that I needed plants that bloomed in three seasons - spring, summer, and fall - because different butterflies lay their eggs at many different times.

After doing all my research, I began to focus on attracting as many types of butterflies as I could by installing their host plants. My host plants now include milkweed, spicebush, false indigo, wild senna, oak trees (I have 3: pin, white, and willow), pussytoes, foxglove, bottlebrush, several different types of sedges, several types of native grasses, New Jersey tea, wild strawberries, rose mallow, viburnum, violets, parsley, redbud, dogwood, sunflower, and several types of asters. All in all, I now have host plants for more than 30 types of butterflies. I have planted two areas of white turtlehead as I am hoping to attract a Baltimore checkerspot, the endangered Maryland state butterfly.



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