

Butterflies and Moths

The UK has 59 species of butterfly and around 2,500 species of moth.

As well as being pollinators, butterflies and moths play a vital role in our ecosystem. Their presence indicates that other invertebrates are there too, and they're an important part of the food chain as prey for birds and bats. For example, blue tit chicks can eat 100 caterpillars each a day!

Butterflies and moths are also beautiful for us to watch and enjoy in our gardens and outdoor spaces.

There are many ways we can help moths and butterflies at home. A small window box, a patch of garden, or even your entire lawn can be used to help moths and butterflies thrive.



Did you know, butterflies can cross continents! Painted ladies migrate north from Africa every year at a speed of up to 30 miles per hour.



We can all make small changes in our gardens to help our butterflies and moths. One of the easiest ways is to do nothing at all!

By **giving the lawnmower a rest** you can encourage a host of common wildflowers and grass species; you may even allow for some rare beauties to pop up. See our **Marvellous Meadows Guide** to find out more.

Different grasses will attract grass breeding butterflies such as the speckled wood, gatekeeper, and ringlet, and wildflowers will offer both a source of nectar and a potential breeding habitat for a range of species.



By **planting pollinator-friendly plants**, you can **create a butterfly garden**.

An ideal butterfly garden would include a wide range of flower shapes and sizes, full of seasonal perennials that offer nectar for early arrivals such as brimstones, through to the last red admirals in autumn.

See our **Flowers for Pollinators Guide** for some ideas.



Alongside nectar-rich flowers, it's good to **think about food plants for caterpillars** in our gardens.

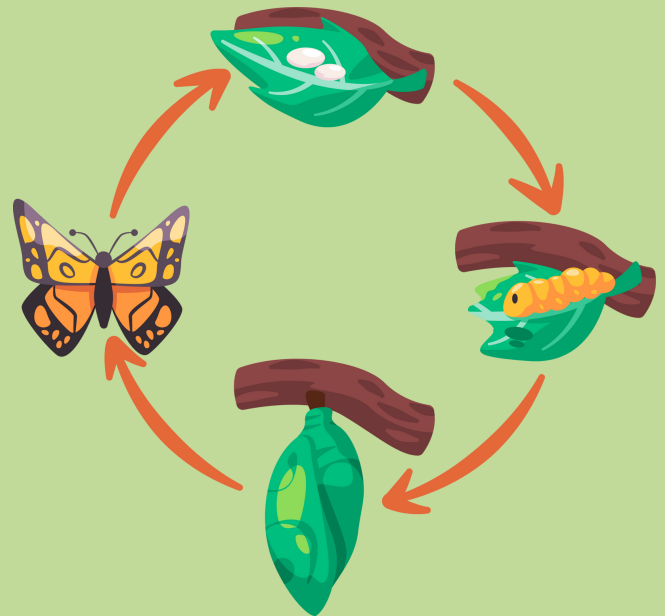
Even if you spot a few holes in your plants remember, the more caterpillars you can support, the more butterflies and moths there will be.

Some species of caterpillar are particularly fussy, such as the cinnabar moth which feeds exclusively on ragwort. Others will feed on a wide range of plants including grasses, nettles, and thistles.

By **leaving patches of long grass unmown throughout winter**, and **generally reducing the amount of tidying up** we do in our gardens, we can ensure that the whole lifecycles of these species are completed.

The pupae of many butterflies and moths spend winter in the long grass, shrubs, and trees, reemerging as a caterpillars in the warmer days of spring when they continue to feed.

After a few more weeks of feeding, these caterpillars will pupate again and metamorphose into their adult forms of butterflies and moths.





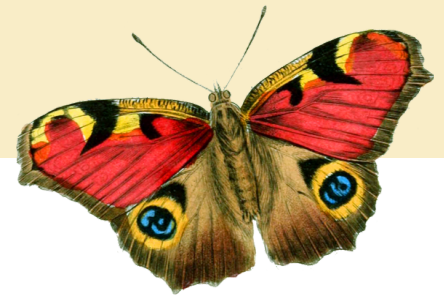
Butterflies

Butterflies can see all colours but have a weak sense of smell, so butterfly pollinated flowers are usually brightly coloured but odourless.

These flowers are often clustered so that butterflies can walk around and feed quickly from many different flowers, such as those on buddleia plant species.

Flowers may also have a landing platform, such as an oxeye daisy, as butterflies are perching feeders.

Each flower has a suitable tube length for a butterfly's tongue.



Moths

Moths are predominantly nocturnal, so the flowers which are mainly pollinated by moths are white or pale colours so they're visible at night, and they have a strong sweet scent which is only released after dark.

Petals are often flat or bent back to allow the moth to enter, with deep tubes for the moth's tongue.

Many moth caterpillars feed on the native plants we consider weeds, so leaving some weeds and long grass in your garden can be very beneficial for them.





Tips on how to attract moths and butterflies to your garden



- Butterflies like warmth so **choose sunny, sheltered spots** when planting nectar plants.
- **Choose different plants to attract a wider variety of species**, and place the same types of plant together in blocks. For ideas of what flowers to plant, check out our **Flowers for Pollinators Guide**.
- Try to **choose a variety of flowers which bloom at different times**, so that they go right through the butterfly season. Spring flowers are vital for butterflies coming out of hibernation, and autumn flowers help butterflies build up their reserves for winter.
- **Prolong flowering** by deadheading (removing fading or dead flowers from plants), mulching (spreading material onto the ground and leaving it there) using organic compost, and watering well to keep the plants healthy.
- It's very helpful to **delay cutting back old plants until the spring** rather than doing it in the autumn. By generally being less tidy in the garden, we can give insects places to rest and hide over the colder seasons.
- **Avoid using insecticides and pesticides** - they kill butterflies and many pollinating insects as well as ladybirds, ground beetles and spiders.
- **Choose peat-free compost**. Peat bogs are home to many special animals and plants, including the large heath butterfly, which is declining across Europe. There are now good alternatives to peat available from garden centres.

