

Attract birds & butterflies no matter what size your landscape

Written by Melinda Myers
Friday, 27 July 2012 00:00



Add a little extra color and motion to your summer garden with containers designed to attract birds and butterflies. Many garden centers continue to sell annuals throughout the summer and many of these mid-season annuals are a bit bigger, providing instant impact.

It's easier than you think to attract birds and butterflies and the good news is you don't need a lot of space to do it. Container gardens give you the ability to attract wildlife to your backyard, patio, deck or even balcony. Simply follow these four steps and your garden will be filled with color, motion and a season of wildlife.

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1- Provide food for birds and butterflies. Include plants with flat daisy-like flowers like pentas, zinnias, and cosmos to attract butterflies. For hummingbirds, include some plants with tubular flowers including nicotiana, cuphea, salvia, and fuchsia. And don't forget about the hungry caterpillars that will soon turn into beautiful butterflies. Parsley, bronze fennel, and licorice vines are a few favorites that make great additions to container gardens. You can even create containers that will attract seed-eating birds. Purple Majesty millet, coneflower, coreopsis, and Rudbeckias will keep many of the birds returning to your landscape.

2- Include water for both the birds and butterflies. It's a key ingredient and a decorative small shallow container filled with water can be included in a large container. Or include a free-standing birdbath within your container collection. I used a bronzed leaf birdbath in just this way. It created a great vertical accent, added interest to a blank wall and provided a water supply for the birds.

3- Give them a place to live and raise their young. Add a few evergreens, ornamental grasses, and perennials to your container garden. Use weather resistant containers that can tolerate the extreme heat and cold in your garden. Then fill with plants that are at least one zone hardier. Or add a few birdhouses. These can be included in the container or mounted on a fence, post, or nearby tree.

4- Skip the pesticides, please. Nature, including the birds you invite into your landscape, will devour many garden pests. Plus, the chemicals designed to kill the bad guys can also kill the good bugs and wildlife you are trying to attract. And, if pests get out of hand, use more eco-friendly products like soaps, Neem, and horticulture oil as a control mechanism. And, as always, read and follow label directions carefully.

And to conserve time and energy, try using one of the self-watering containers or hanging baskets that are on the market. This helps to make it both easy and convenient when time

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constraints and vacations get in the way of providing ideal care. I recently tried using one of the Gardener's Supply [Easy Roller](#) self-watering containers. I filled one with wildlife-friendly petunias along with papyrus and golden moneywort. After a five-day trip during hot dry weather I returned to find my container garden in great shape and hummingbirds visiting the flowers.

So gather your family and get started planting your wildlife container garden today.

*Nationally known gardening expert, TV/radio host, author & columnist Melinda Myers has more than 30 years of horticulture experience and has written over 20 gardening books, including [Can't Miss Small Space Gardening](#). She hosts the nationally syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment segments which air on over 115 TV and radio stations throughout the U.S. and Canada. She is a columnist and contributing editor for [Birds & Blooms](#) magazine and writes the twice monthly "Gardeners' Questions" newspaper column. Melinda also has a column in [Gardening How-to](#) magazine. Melinda hosted "The Plant Doctor" radio program for over 20 years as well as seven seasons of [Great Lakes Gardener](#) on PBS. She has written articles for [Better Homes and Gardens](#) and [Fine Gardening](#) and was a columnist and contributing editor for [Backyard Living](#) magazine. Melinda has a master's degree in horticulture, is a certified arborist and was a horticulture instructor with tenure. Her web site is www.melindamyers.com *