

## Butterfly Gardens

A butterfly garden can quickly become the main attraction of your landscape. These colorful gardens are cherished for the beautiful butterflies they attract.

Besides the well-known monarch butterfly, there are over 150 different butterfly species that may be found in the Midwestern United States.

Butterfly gardens will also attract other nectar-feeding animals. These include hummingbirds, honeybees, bumblebees and moths.

Select a sunny site for your butterfly garden. Make sure that it is sheltered from harsh winds. Locate the garden in a place where you will be able to easily watch the butterflies.

The plants you select for the garden and surrounding home landscape will make a big difference. You need to provide two types of food for butterflies: plant tissue for when they are caterpillars, and nectar sources for when they have matured into winged adults.

Landscape trees and shrubs may be used to provide food for the leaf-eating caterpillars. Recommended plants include birch, cherry, Eastern redbud, oak, hackberry, plum, sweet mockorange, viburnum and willow.

Other good food sources for caterpillars include such perennials as clover, Kentucky bluegrass, little bluestem, violets, aster and hollyhock.

For adult butterflies, plant several different flowers to make nectar available throughout spring, summer and fall. Butterflies are generally attracted to purple, orange, yellow or red flowers.

Recommended annual flowers include alyssum, cleome, cosmos, dianthus, nasturtium, petunia, verbena and zinnias.

Recommended perennial flowers include blazing star, butterfly bush,



A Painted Lady butterfly on a zinnia.

candytuft, columbine, gladiolus, peony, phlox, purple coneflower, sedum, stiff goldenrod, violets and yarrow.

Some herbs are attractive to butterflies. Dill, lavender, lemon balm, marjoram, parsley, peppermint, rosemary, sage and thyme are good selections.

Even some weeds, such as dandelions, milkweed and Queen Anne's lace will attract butterflies.

## Control of Perennial Weedy Grasses

Perennial grasses, such as quackgrass and nimblewill, are some of the most difficult to control weeds in the lawn. Control is difficult because there is no herbicide that will selectively destroy these weeds. Also, pulling or digging these perennial grasses is often unsuccessful. The best way to control quackgrass, nimblewill and other undesirable, perennial grasses in the lawn is to spot treat the weed-infested areas with glyphosate (Roundup, Kleenup, etc.).

Glyphosate is a systemic, non-selective herbicide. Glyphosate is absorbed through the foliage and is then translocated to all plant parts. It kills nearly all plants that are directly sprayed. Visible symptoms usually develop in 7 to 10 days of the application. Death occurs in 2 to 4 weeks.

Efforts to control undesirable perennial grasses in the lawn should

begin in mid-summer. This allows adequate time to kill the weedy grasses and prepare the areas for seeding or sodding in late summer. Complete destruction of the weeds is necessary to prevent their reappearance. If the treated areas are not dead in 2 to 4 weeks, a second application is necessary. Treated areas can be seeded or sodded 7 days after application.

If you plan to sow seed, it's not necessary to dig up the destroyed areas. Vigorously rake these areas with a stiff tined garden rake to remove some of the dead debris and to break the soil surface. After seeding, work the seed into the soil by lightly raking the area and keep the soil moist with frequent, light applications of water. The best time to seed bare spots is mid-August through



Nimblewill

September. If you plan to sod, remove the dead debris before laying the sod.

The establishment of a thick, healthy lawn and its proper maintenance will help prevent future weed infestations.

## Maintaining Your Birch Tree

Cultural practices (mulching, watering, fertilizing and pruning) play an important role in developing and maintaining healthy birch trees. Mulching and proper watering are the most important. These two practices can create the cool, moist soil conditions that birch trees need. The following information provides guidelines to help create optimum conditions for your tree.

**Mulching**—Aside from aesthetic benefits, mulching moderates soil temperatures (keeps soil cool during summer heat), conserves water in the soil, reduces competition from other plants, adds organic matter to the soil as it decomposes and reduces soil compaction. Also, the decomposition process helps build new layers of soil with improved structure which aids in better water retention and oxygen exchange. Finally, placing mulch around the base of a tree reduces the likelihood of damaging the stem with a lawnmower or weed trimmer. All these benefits create a healthy environment for tree roots and help promote tree growth and survival.

The best materials for mulching are wood chips, shredded bark and leaf compost. Rock or stone mulch can also be used. While aiding in water retention, rock or stone mulch will not add organic matter to the soil, nor will it reduce weed growth. In addition, reflect-

ive heat may be a problem with white marble chips and crushed limestone may increase soil pH. Crushed or washed river stone is probably the best material if rock or stone mulch is your desired choice. Do not place plastic under any of the mulches since it can retard water movement and oxygen diffusion into the soil.

**Watering**—Sufficient water is probably the single most important factor in maintaining a healthy birch tree. If rainfall is insufficient, supplemental watering may become necessary. During the growing season a slow (2-3 hours), deep (8-18 inches) watering once per week is a general rule for maintaining adequate soil moisture. Infrequent, light waterings are not recommended. Laying a hose on the ground and allowing it to run slowly over the root zone is a very good technique for ensuring adequate watering. A soil that can be formed into a ball in your hand has sufficient moisture; loose, dry soil that crumbles in your hand indicates the need for additional watering. Watering should be decreased by late August to allow for proper winterization of a tree.

**Fertilizing**—Fertilization is beneficial only when nutrients are lacking. A soil test should be completed to determine the need for corrective measures. If a tree is showing stress symptoms

that are not the result of insufficient nutrients, fertilization will not correct the problem.

The best time to fertilize trees is late fall or early spring. Do not apply fertilizers between mid-August and mid-September as that may force a late flush of growth that may not harden off before winter. Nutrients should be available to the tree during its peak growth period in the spring and early summer. Fertilizers should not be applied when the ground is frozen.

**Pruning**—Comments on pruning in this section are very general.

Excessive pruning (greater than 25 percent of the live canopy) should always be avoided. Heavy pruning increases light penetration to the root zone and can increase soil temperatures and reduce soil moisture levels. Pruning of birch trees should NOT be done between May 1 and August 1. This is the flight period of the bronze birch borer, and it has been shown that female birch borers are attracted to fresh pruning wounds. If pruning must be done during this time period, treat the wound with a registered insecticide. Wound dressings should not be used since they are not effective at repelling borers and do not promote closing of wounds.

Proper pruning techniques are important and should be followed when pruning trees.

### GREEN ACRES

## Family Skills and Desires



Don Janssen  
UNL Extension Educator

*Note: This is part of a series of articles related to acreage enterprises.*

Whether your enterprise fits your family's goals and abilities is a big factor in its success. For example, families often take on a farming enterprise based solely on financial factors. They might discover they really do not enjoy the crop they grow, and the work becomes drudgery.

Here are some things to consider:

### Use Your Strengths

- What do you love to do? Growing a crop that you enjoy working with and believe in will get you through hard times and help you market it. Don't force yourself into a type of farming based solely on external factors. If your real love is working with animals, you might not be happy owning a nursery.
- What do you know how to do? Farming is made up of many important skills—mechanical, bookkeeping, management and so on. Involve yourself and other family members in farming tasks for which they have some related training.
- What do you do well? People have a variety of abilities—for example, a knack for nurturing calves or growing bedding plants.

### Be Aware of How You and Your Family Want to Live

- Check into the production calendar for the crop you are considering. How do you feel about the schedule? Does it fit with off-farm work schedules? Does your family like to take a long vacation during the summer? How important are holidays? For example, if you plant Christmas trees, harvest is likely to interfere with some winter holidays.
- How many hours and what months of the year do you want to work on the farm? It's easy to work incredibly long hours on a farm. What about the social activities your family likes?
- What is your comfort level with risk? Do you thrive on a bit of it or does it scare you? Some crops pose little financial risk but promise little income. Other crops have the potential for high profits but pose very high levels of risk.
- Direct marketing usually involves a lot of contact with people. Do you like dealing with people?
- Is the whole family excited about farming? Moving to a rural environment can cause stress to family members that prefer a more urban lifestyle.