



# Sharing Nature with Children

A Tour to Inspire You:  
Butterfly Garden at the Metcalf School on the  
Campus of Illinois State University

by Karen Stephens

**B**utterflies. They gracefully trace blue skies with iridescent wings. Etched with designs that rival stained-glass art, they're a "symbol of the soul." There's no denying it, butterflies are the prettiest insects around!

The butterfly garden is colorful and fragrant. It will intrigue kids' curious minds and soften their hearts toward nature. With you as guide, they'll learn to care for and protect earth's creatures. And butterflies need it. By destroying habitat and using pesticides, humans put a stop to the butterfly's dance. Fell Arboretum shows us how we can change our ways, before it's too late.

The butterfly garden didn't happen by chance. It took purposeful planning. Strolling in the garden, you'll see a butterfly haven in action!

This garden gets full sun; the butterflies need it for warmth and food. Colorful flowers with varying blooming time provide butterflies food from spring through fall frost.

You can't get butterflies without caterpillars, so this garden includes "host plants." Butterflies lay eggs on them; when caterpillars hatch, they instinctively gorge on the host plant. (Some butterflies are finicky. The monarch only lays eggs on milkweed plants. Why? Milkweed is all her caterpillars will eat. And you thought YOU had a picky eater!)

Birdbaths and rocks collect rain to become butterfly watering holes. The garden has bushy plants of different heights so butterflies and caterpillars can "hide out" from predators like birds and praying mantis. It's handy shelter in harsh weather, too!

Those are butterfly garden basics. But there's much more to discover. To lure children to a winged sanctuary, following is a "seek and find" challenge.

## Items to Seek and Find

- Birds like to eat butterflies and caterpillars. Find good places for butterflies to hide!
- Butterflies get thirsty. Where can they find water?
- Find a butterfly eating. What flower is it? What plant does a caterpillar like?
- Butterflies come in rainbow colors. Name all the colors you see.
- Many creatures live in the garden. What insects live with the butterflies? (Spiders are arachnids, so you can't count them!) What birds, mammals, or reptiles live in the garden?
- Butterflies like flowers of all sizes. Find a tall one, short one, and a teeny-tiny one.
- Watch a butterfly resting on a rock with wings outstretched. What is it doing?
- Search out a garden bench. Lay back and watch a butterfly pass by. Describe its flight.
- These are common butterflies. How many can you spy? — monarch, tiger, swallowtail, black swallowtail, spicebush swallowtail, cabbage white, red-spotted purple, painted lady, red admiral, comma, question mark, yellow sulphurs, blues, mourning cloak, great spangled fritillary, viceroy.
- Butterflies love the nectar of these flowers. Circle all you can find: bee balm, black-eyed susan, butterfly bush, butterfly weed, cardinal flower, coreopsis, cosmos, day lily, goldenrod, hollyhock, honeysuckle, lantana, lavender, marigold, milkweed, nicotiana, petunia, phlox, purple coneflower, salvia, sunflower, thistle, trumpet vine, yarrow, and zinnia.

I wish I could be there when the kids jump up and squeal, "Hey, I found it! I found it!" But that's not what's important. What's important is that YOU'LL be there.

In 1980, Karen Stephens became director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. She writes a weekly newspaper column, "Keeping the Young at Heart," and is the author of a high school textbook, *The Child Care Professional*.