

A Few Pointers on looking at Insects in the Garden-

part 4 Butterflies

Butterflies are active during the daytime and are quite often seen flying around the garden. Females prefer to lay eggs on plants with new growth. This means the caterpillar stage can often be located on the leaves of plants. Like looking for moth caterpillars, you simply scan the plant for any eaten leaves and look closer to see what may be eating them. Butterfly caterpillars are smooth, unlike most moth caterpillars that are hairy and therefore not to be touched.

If you would like to increase butterfly activity in your backyard, then start butterfly gardening. It's easy as:

1. growing a few plants for the caterpillars to feed on;
2. supply plants with good nectar production for the butterflies to feed.

Now it's not just any plant, you have to do some homework, look at the butterflies in your area and look at the information on their host food plant.

For example; the Citrus butterfly lays its eggs on plants from the citrus family. These eggs will hatch and the caterpillars will feed on the leaves of the citrus. You can watch the caterpillar developing till they change to a pupa. The pupa is attached to the citrus plant.

The pupa will hang until it is ready to hatch, at this stage the pupa changes to a translucent shell. If you look closely you will see the butterfly all tucked up inside. When the butterfly hatches it will hang for a few hours before taking flight around the garden, looking for plants with flowers to feed.



Take a close look at this butterfly pupa, you can see the butterfly colour inside. The antennae are folded back from the head. This butterfly will hatch from this pupa within hours of colouring up.

Some garden plants are especially attractive; Buddleia (butterfly plant) and Lantana are old time favourites as they are brightly coloured to attract the butterfly and both produce good amounts of nectar for the butterfly to feed. Other plants include Ixora, Pentas, red Bottle brush , Tea tree and more.

Butterflies are also attracted to the presence of caterpillar food plants. Females will glide between plants, laying eggs on the host plant. Females can smell the food plants from great distances.

How to keep butterfly caterpillars.

1. To keep the butterfly caterpillar you will need a large container (see image below), always add a twig in the container so the insect can take hold.
2. Take some cuttings from the food plant you found the caterpillar feeding on. Add these to the container. Best way to do this is to put them in a jar full of water, cuttings are put through holes in the lid.
3. Clean and change the food plant every couple days.
4. When the caterpillars change to pupae, no feeding is required. Occasionally mist the pupa with water. Watch daily for changes in colour in the pupae, till they hatch. The freshly emerged butterfly will hang for a while until it's ready to take flight.
5. Time to release your butterflies into your garden.

There is loads of information available on butterflies and in particular butterflies for your area. A great book for identification and food plants:

The Complete Field Guide to Butterflies of Australia. Author: Michael. F. Braby.

For further reference:

Butterflies of Australia. Author: I. F. B. Common & D.E. Waterhouse.

Insects You Should NOT Handle.

Caution should always be applied when it comes to picking up any insect. Insects like water bugs, assassin bugs, hairy caterpillars and of course wasps, bees, stink bugs and biting ants, all can either sting, bite, pinch or spray you with smelly fluids. So it is important to learn more about insects and have an enjoyable experience. Most insects pose no harm to us humans.

You will come across spiders during your search, best to avoid all spiders, unless an adult can confirm your find as harmless.

***Beware** of other critters that may be hiding in the plant foliage such as Spiders and Stink bugs.*

How to make a Butterfly Caterpillar House

You will need:

1. one large plastic container with lid and clip on handles, dimensions 60cm high x 45cm wide x 45cm deep. (30 litre capacity)
2. a piece of shade cloth or mosquito netting, size 80cm x 65cm (or appropriate for the size of the lid you are using)



to attach the screening you will need one of the following:

1. to sew, hack saw or similar;
2. some fishing line;
3. drill with small size drill bit

or glue the screening using silastic
or gaffer tape the screening.

Step 1. Using the hack saw cut the centre out of the lid, removing as much as possible.



Step 2. Choose what method you will use to attach the shade cloth or mosquito netting.
either: drilling holes to sew with fishing line (we recommend this method)
or: using quality gaffer tape (downfall – if not thoroughly attached insects can get caught in any sticky parts)



Step 3. Attach the shade cloth or similar material to the lid. In this image the sewing method has been used. Now drill a number of holes around the edge of the lid. If you are using gaffer tape, it is advisable to attach it on the outside, this way you avoid any insects get stuck on any exposed tape.

Step 4. Wash container and lid, dry thoroughly before use.

Step 5. With lid on, stand your insect house on its end, so it stands tall. Now you can use the lid as a door, simply push it on and clip shut with the handles.

That's it! Your butterfly house is ready for use.
Now refer to the housing section on the care sheet.

