

The summer of 2020 presents a 'butterfly delight'

By Grazyna Tonkiel

The air is pulsing with scorching heat. Summer is upon us and it is my 2020 "Butterfly Delight."

Since the very beginning of the season, I've been rewarded with a large, diverse number of butterflies, which have picked my garden as their permanent home for the year. Many butterflies are territorial, once they select a habitat they will stay there until they complete their life pursuit – producing the next generation of their own species. The newly emerging generation will remain in my surroundings over the Winter, with the exemption of the butterflies that migrate.

It took years of thoughtful planting to turn my garden into a Butterfly Habitat, cultivating grounds of carefully selected vegetation, some as a source of food for butterflies and some as host plants for grazing, ever hungry, caterpillars. My strategy is working.

I'm fortunate to host an unprecedented number and variety of different Swallowtails this year. I will never forget my first Swallowtail and the majestic beat of its elegant tiger-striped wings. The excitement never fades, even year after year as I witness their magnificent flight and recognize that my Hops plants make them stay. Giant Swallowtails are flying around me as I write this update reaching a size of 4.5 inches.

For a long time, I've been trying to replace grass on my lawn with White Clover and additionally grow some Wild Daisies, Dwarf Dandelions, Yellow Goat's Beard, King Devils in between. This natural Meadow is not for everybody, but in my case, it is simply beautiful.

This year my meadow finally looked the way I had envisioned, desired and aimed for over the last ten years. My meadow was the highlight for the little butterflies. Every morning I watched Eastern Tailed Blues, Cherry Gall Azures, Silvery Blues as well as Bronze Coppers and new to my habitat some Skippers and Dreamy Duskywings feeding on Clover. Tiny butterflies have very small proboscis, the elongated straw-like mouth they use for feeding, so naturally small clover flowers are

most suitable for them.

The blazing hot days of this year's summer is speeding the maturation of vegetation. I have the impression that Nature is rushing to grow and develop with unusual pace this Summer. Milkweed is thriving and Zinnias, which I planted late, are in full bloom. Monarch butterflies, a Canadian symbol of summer, are in good numbers this year. They look radiant and very healthy. Towering Milkweed awaits for their precious cargo, tiny eggs laid by female Monarchs. Lucky me, I was able to quietly capture photos of mating Monarchs; I believe the Monarch couple won't mind if I share the images with the world.

Butterflies are "Children of the Sun," they need sun energy to maintain their body temperature. Hot summers make their lives much easier, but as any living creature they need water to survive and thrive. We take care of thirsty birds with bird baths in our gardens, who may crave a much-needed sip of water. What about the butterflies? Let us join forces to create water puddlers for butterflies and other pollinators, in every garden in King Township. All you need is a flowerpot saucer or plate to hold 1 to 2 inches of sand, a handful of plain Epsom salt or any other type of salt with minerals, a handful of manure all mixed together and a few stones on top. The next step is to moisten the sand with water, so that butterflies can easily stand on a moist surface. Puddlers should be placed directly on the ground. I watch insects drinking from my puddlers with the same satisfaction and delight as I watch birds drinking from my bird bath.

Wishing all readers the same delightful butterfly moments throughout the summer.

Grazyna Tonkiel is an accomplished opera singer, visual artist and a conservationist. She was the soloist at Polish National Opera and Ballet Theater in Warsaw and won national and international vocal competitions; her butterfly studies are in collections in over 10 countries. She can be reached at her Gallery Solo studio in King City – www.gtonkiel.com



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