

Painted

August is the best month to visit Kent's beautiful gardens and woodland and spot several species of our native butterflies

Words by Caroline Edmunds
pictures by Darryl Curcher

Butterflies are fascinating and colourful insects which are a wonderfully uplifting sight around our gardens in summer. They rely on nectar to fuel their brief lives and with a little thought about what and where we plant, it is possible to attract some of the most common butterflies to any garden, including Brimstones, Large and Small Whites, Red Admirals, Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks.

The Red Admiral was recorded as the butterfly seen the most in the 2003 butterfly garden count by Butterfly Conservation followed by the Large and Small White, the Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Painted Lady.

Planting a group of butterfly-friendly plants together will help them find the nectar-rich flowers in a garden. Butterflies prefer plants in sunny but sheltered spots, and we should also always spare a thought for the caterpillars by leaving a few weeds in the garden, especially nettles, which several caterpillars eat.

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Once you have identified butterflies in the garden, it's worth checking in a butterfly book and planting their caterpillar food plants, such as sweet rocket for orange tips.

Butterflies prefer some flowers more than others and many of the gardens we can visit as well as our own have wild areas of garden as well as borders full of colourful nectar-rich flowers that attract butterflies.



One of my favourite gardens for their wild meadows and wildlife including butterflies is Marie Place in Brenchley, which has several wild areas of garden including a field meadow left uncut each year and attracts hundreds of little meadow brown butterflies that enjoy the sunny sheltered site.

Hole Park in Rolvenden also has wild areas of garden and woodland. I recently

edge of farmland and in hedgerows. These habitats are essential to caterpillars who often will only feed on just one plant. Sadly, these habitats are declining and we can all help by having areas in our own gardens for caterpillars.

Godinton Gardens has plenty of nectar-rich plants, including Buddleja Davidii (Butterfly Bush) and Sedum Spectabile (Ice Plant). They also have Verbena Bonariensis and Perovskia Atriplicifolia (Russian sage), various hebes and Corydalis x clandonensis, all of which attract butterflies.

Bedgebury National Pinetum also has large areas of meadow with purple scabious which are perfect for spotting several species of butterflies, including the Painted Lady. All the gardens

observed a beautiful Red Admiral close up on nettles near the wild garden.

Woodland is home to three quarters of the butterfly population in Britain and about 40 species of Britain's 55 resident butterflies can be seen in woodland.

Both Hole Park in Rolvenden and Godinton House and Gardens near Ashford are surrounded by parkland and footpaths, which provide further opportunities to see butterflies on the



ladies



Far left: Hole Park
Left: Common Blue butterfly flies between April and September
Bottom left: Comma butterfly has distinctive ragged-edge wings
Below right: Red Admiral, commonest in July and August, pictured at Hole Park

mentioned also have water features and ponds, and these are great places to spot dragonflies at this time of year.

Hole Park also has verbenas, buddleja, sedums and scabious together with Centaurea in their gardens, all of which attract butterflies.

Verbenas will attract a large variety of butterfly including: Brown Argus, Comma, Essex Skipper, Green-veined White, Large White, Meadow Brown, Painted Lady, Peacock, Red Admiral, Small Copper, Small Tortoiseshell and Small White.

Popularly known as the butterfly bush, the Buddleia group contains some shrubs that every butterfly gardener should have in their garden and you can expect to see Peacocks, Red Admiral and Tortoiseshell butterflies

on these hardy, easy to grow shrubs.

Clumps of Sedums, rather than single plants, are also excellent for attracting butterflies. Consider planting Stardust, Iceberg, Pink Fairy and Brilliant.

Field Scabious is a very pretty flower and attracts the Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Small Tortoiseshell, Small White, and White Letter Hairstreak.

Marle Place Gardens and Gallery in Brenchley has been recognised for its outstanding contribution to gardening for wildlife with a gold award from the Kent Wildlife Trust and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. Owner Lindel Williams has planted several plants to attract butterflies including cornflowers, marigold, hebe, thistle, nettle, honeysuckle, sweet rocket and tobacco plants. ■



want to go there?

Marle Place Gardens in Brenchley are open until October between Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday or by appointment from 10 am until 5pm. Picnics are allowed in the areas of long grass and woodland only. There is a self-service restaurant near the entrance to the gardens with cakes and tea.

Admission: adults £4.50, senior citizens £4, children 4-12 £1.
www.marleplace.co.uk

Hole Park in Rolvenden is open between 2 and 6pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays from the beginning of April to the end of October.

Admission: adults £4, children 50p.
www.holepark.com

Godinton House and Gardens are near Ashford and 10 miles from Tenterden.

Godinton House and Gardens are open Friday to Sunday 2pm - 5.30pm until 8 October (last tour of the house leaves at 4.30pm.) The Gardens are open Thursday to Monday 2pm - 5.30pm until 29 October.

Admission: adults £3, children free.
www.godinton-house-gardens.co.uk