



# Butterflies in Your Garden

University of California Cooperative Extension  
Stanislaus County



Butterflies are a welcome visitor in any garden. To attract them, you will need to provide food plants for both the caterpillar and adult stages. Add plants to your existing garden, or use an empty space and fill it with new plants.

This publication will help you choose and take care of plants known to attract butterflies.

## BUTTERFLIES OF STANISLAUS COUNTY

Here are a few species commonly seen in our area:

Cabbage White  
Common Buckeye  
Clouded Sulphur  
Monarch  
Mourning Cloak  
Painted Lady  
Red Admiral  
Western Tiger Swallowtail

To see photos go to:  
<http://mamba.bio.uci.edu/~pjbryant/biodiv/lepidopt/index.htm>

## BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLE

Butterflies undergo metamorphosis, a fascinating process. For a more detailed explanation, see the books mentioned in the bibliography of this publication.

The cycle begins when a female butterfly spots a

specific host plant growing in a sunny spot. She will recognize the plant by sight, or pick up its scent. Then she will taste it with her proboscis or feet. Often females will tap the leaves, a behavior known as “drumming.” This releases chemicals that help her identify the plant. As a rule, females avoid plants with eggs or caterpillars already on them.

The host plant chosen depends upon the butterfly species. Sometimes more than one type of plant is favorable. Eggs are laid singly or in clusters.

The eggs hatch in about 5-10 days. Eggs in warmer places can hatch faster. Once hatched, most caterpillars will eat their own eggshell. Then, the tiny caterpillars begin to eat and will shed their skin 4-6 times.

After about 2-4 weeks of feeding, the caterpillar is fully grown and enters the pupal stage. This stage may last up to two weeks. The butterfly emerges from its chrysalis, and remains still until its wings harden, and then it flies away.

Males immediately begin looking for females, while mated females look for host plants.

## BUTTERFLY REQUIREMENTS

Butterflies cannot fly until

their body temperature reaches at least 85°F. Provide evergreen plants and rocks in your garden so they can sun themselves in the morning.

One of the ways butterflies get water and nutrients is by visiting puddles of water. Create a puddle by filling a bowl or terra cotta saucer with garden soil. Sink it into the ground and make sure it stays wet. Tiger swallowtails are the most common butterflies known to frequent these puddles.

To help shelter butterflies from the wind, plant rows of shrubs or trees. Or install a fence or garden arbor.

Butterflies are very sensitive to pesticides, so avoid using these products in your garden. This includes the naturally occurring insecticide Bt or *Bacillus thuringiensis* which kills caterpillars.

Species of butterflies that overwinter may do so in your garden. They prefer hiding amongst logs and tree crevices. Research on constructed butterfly boxes suggests that butterflies do not use them.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

Gardeners who attract butterflies to their garden should be prepared for caterpillar behavior. When

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eggs hatch, the tiny caterpillar is very hungry (yes, just like the one in the storybook, “The Very Hungry Caterpillar”). Caterpillars can easily defoliate many of their host plants in just a few days. In most cases, the plants will bounce back. If they don’t, you will need to replace them.

## HOST PLANTS

Host plants are divided into two groups, foliage and nectar. Each group of plants is important for butterfly growth and development.

Unfortunately, some plants may be difficult or almost impossible to acquire, for numerous reasons.

When nurseries order plants for the year, the growers get an idea of how much to plant. This means there may be a limited supply of certain plants. It’s a good idea to call a local nursery in late winter and ask if you can place a special order. Special orders often take a minimum of 6 weeks.

## WEEDY GARDEN?

Interestingly enough, many weeds that gardeners abhor are just what caterpillar larvae need. These weeds include bermudagrass, clover, crabgrass, plantain, stinging and burning nettle, fiddleneck, cheeseweed and wild mustard. If you don’t have these weeds in your garden, you may have trouble finding the seeds or plants. Identify them by using our web site at

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/menu.weeds.html> and see if you can find them in a neighbor or friend’s yard. Then transplant small plants in the spring, or harvest the seed pods when almost dry and plant in the spring.

## PLANT TYPES

In this publication, plants are also divided into the categories of annual and perennial. Annual plants live for about one season, flower, set seed and die. Perennials live for several years. Some perennials die back in the winter, while others are evergreen.

Your garden will need a variety of plants that bloom at different times so butterflies will always have food. Plants of various heights are helpful also, as smaller species of butterflies prefer to feed on low growing plants, while larger species of butterflies prefer to feed on tall plants.

## “TOP TEN” PLANTS

These nectar plants are irresistible to adult butterflies. The common name of the plant is listed first, followed by the botanical name. The term “species means” that all types of that particular plant will attract butterflies.

Aster  
*Aster* species

Black-eyed Susan  
*Rudbeckia* species

Butterfly Bush  
*Buddleia* species

Coreopsis  
*Coreopsis* species

Joe-Pye Weed  
*Eupatorium* species

Lantana  
*Lantana* species

Milkweed  
*Asclepias* species

Liatris or Blazing Star  
*Liatris* species

Pentas  
*Pentas lanceolata*

Purple Coneflower  
*Echinacea purpurea*

You may already have some of these plants in your landscape. The two plants you will most likely need to special order are butterfly weed (a type of milkweed) and joe-pye weed.

## CAN’T FIND IT IN TOWN?

Try ordering seeds online from places like Wildflower Farm or Butterfly Encounters.

## BUTTERFLY PLANT GUIDE

The plants in this guide are divided into two categories. The first is “Nectar Plants for Adults” on pages 4-8. The information is further broken down by:

- ◇ Common & Botanical Plant Name
- ◇ Plant Type
  - Annual (A)
  - Perennial (P)
- ◇ Plant Height
  - Low 0-2’ (L)
  - Medium 2-4’ (M)

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Tall 5' or taller (T)

## ◇ Plant Growing Tips

The second category is “Caterpillars and their Preferred Food.” The information is broken down by butterfly/caterpillar, the food plant, and growing tips.

### **WHEN TO PLANT**

For plants already in 6 packs or 4” containers, follow the advice on the planting guide that says “plant in spring or summer” or “plant in fall or winter.” To grow these plants from seed, plant in either spring or fall, as seeds need more time to become established.

### **WATER NEEDS**

Plant water requirements depend on if you use sprinkler or drip irrigation. Gardeners with sandy soil may need to water more often than gardeners who have clay soil. The best way to determine when to water is to dig down to a depth of at least 6-8” and see if the soil is still damp.

When watering, water your plants deeply, then let the soil dry out. Eventually you will get an idea of how often to water and won't have to dig.

Also, check out the publication “Water-Wise Gardening,” available from our office for \$1.50 (2009 price).

### **EXPANDING PUB**

As I spot new butterflies in the area I will add to the

publication. So check back once in a while to see what's new. Also feel free to contact me if you find butterflies not listed in this publication in your garden.

### **CALIFORNIA DOGFACE**

This butterfly is our state butterfly but is not seen very often. The larvae feed on False indigo (*Amorpha californica*). They fly from February to December. The seeds are available online from various butterfly plant stores.

### **MORE RESEARCH NEEDED**

For some larval food plant sources (especially trees) I have found conflicting information relating to which species larvae prefer. For example, for the Mourningcloak butterfly, Elm is listed by one site as American Elm, and another as Chinese Elm. Both sites were created by university researchers. So it's possible that both are correct, or that only one is correct.

Choose plants from the following plant guide that best fit your landscape.

Please feel free to send an email to let me know of your successes in attracting various types of caterpillars to your garden.

### **KIDS & BUTTERFLIES**

Here is a neat site for parents and teachers:

<http://www.kidsbutterfly.org/>

# Butterfly Plant Guide

## Nectar Plants for Adults

### *Nearly Year Round Bloom*

Common & Botanical Name	Type	Height & Spread	Growing Tips
<b>Alyssum</b> <i>Lobularia maritima</i>	A	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in fall or spring. Moderate water. Flowers are pink, purple, white or yellow. Tends to reseed itself, but not invasively. Replant each season, as flowers usually die out.
<b>Dianthus</b> <i>Dianthus</i> species	A	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in fall or spring. Regular water. Flowers are pink, red, white or combinations of these colors. Replant each season, as flowers tend to look ragged.
<b>Lantana</b> <i>Lantana</i> species	P shrub, ground cover	L	Plant in full sun fall, spring or summer. Little to moderate water. Flowers are yellow, orange, red, or a combination of those colors. Also purple or pink. Many color variations exist.
<b>Pentas or Star Clusters</b> <i>Pentas lanceolata</i>	A	M	Plant in full sun in spring or summer. Little to moderate water. Flowers are white, purple, red, orange and pink and star shaped. Tender perennial grown as an annual.
<b>Rosemary</b> <i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	P shrub, ground cover	L, M	Plant in full sun in fall, spring or summer. Little water. Flowers are white, pink or blue. Growth habits vary, some are shrub-like, others “weep” and still others can be used as a ground cover.
<b>Viburnum</b> <i>Viburnum</i> species	P	M, T shrub	Plant in full sun during any season. Regular water. Flowers are small and sometimes fragrant, followed by fruit. Choose an evergreen species like <i>V. japonicum</i> .

### *Fall through Spring bloom*

Common & Botanical Name	Type	Height & Spread	Growing Tips
<b>Primrose</b> <i>Primula</i> species	A	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in fall. Regular water. Flowers are white, pink, blue, purple, red or yellow. Primroses species come in many different plant and flower forms.
<b>Snapdragon</b> <i>Antirrhinum majus</i>	A	L,M	Plant in full sun in fall. Regular water. Flowers are pink, purple, yellow, white, and red. Flower heights vary depending on species.
<b>Sweet Pea</b> <i>Lathyrus odoratus</i>	A	T vine	Plant in full sun in fall. Regular water. Flowers are pink, purple, white, and red. Growth habit can be vine or bush. Soak seeds before planting to speed up germination process, but keep soil moist.

# Butterfly Plant Guide

## Nectar Plants for Adults

### *Early Spring Bloom*

Common & Botanical Name	Type	Height	Growing Tips
<b>Apple Tree</b> <i>Malus</i> species	P tree	T	Plant in full sun in winter, spring or summer. Regular water. Flowers are white or whitish pink. For more information, consult “Deciduous Fruit Trees in Your Garden” from our office.
<b>Candytuft</b> <i>Iberis sempervirens</i>	P ground cover	L	Plant in full sun for best bloom in spring or summer. Needs regular water. Showy bloom in spring, blooms sporadically during summer and fall.
<b>Chives</b> <i>Allium schoenoprasum</i>	P	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring or summer. Regular water while blooming. Pink flowers.
<b>Citrus</b> <i>Citrus</i> species	P	T	Plant in full sun during any season. Regular water. Flowers are white and fragrant.
<b>Forget-Me-Not</b> <i>Myosotis sylvatica</i>	A	L	Plant in partial shade in late summer or early fall. Regular water. Flowers are blue. Can be invasive, avoid planting near native areas. May only be available as seed.
<b>Lilac</b> <i>Syringa vulgaris</i>	P shrub or tree	T	Plant in partial shade during any season. Regular water. Flowers are purple, white or pink and fragrant. Prune lightly after flowering. Can eventually reach 20 feet tall.
<b>Wisteria</b> <i>Wisteria</i> species	P vine	T	Plant in full sun in any season. Water-wise vine. Deep soak, do not water until soil is dry. Fragrant purple or white flowers. For more details on pruning, see the Sunset Western Garden Book.
<b>White Clover</b> <i>Trifolium repens</i>	P ground cover	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring. Regular water. Spreads quickly and can take over an area. Keep contained. Usually available as seed.

### *Spring through Summer Bloom*

Common & Botanical Name	Type	Height	Growing Tips
<b>Catmint</b> <i>Nepeta x faassenii</i>	P	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring, summer or fall. Moderate water. Flowers are small and blue, foliage is gray. Makes a nice groundcover.
<b>Phlox</b> <i>Phlox</i> species	A, P	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring or summer. Regular water. Flowers are pink, white, blue, purple, red, yellow, and orange.
<b>Fleabane</b> <i>Erigeron speciosus</i>	P	L, M	Plant in partial shade in spring, summer or fall. Needs little to moderate water. Purple, pink or white flowers.
<b>Shasta Daisy</b> <i>Chrysanthemum maximum</i>	P	M	Plant in full sun in spring, summer or fall. Regular water Some types may bloom until fall. Divide clumps in fall or spring when they get too big.

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## Nectar Plants for Adults

### *Spring through Fall Bloom*

Common & Botanical Name	Type	Height	Growing Tips
<b>California Buckeye</b> <i>Aesculus californica</i>	P tree	T	Plant in full sun in spring. Moderate water. Flowers are white, pink or red and candelabra-like. Flowers are also fragrant. This California native tree normally drops its leaves in July, but if given enough water will hold them until fall. May need to be special ordered.
<b>Cosmos</b> <i>Cosmos</i> species	A	L, M	Plant in full sun in spring or summer. Moderate water. Flowers are pink, white and bi-colored as well as yellowish orange. Tend to re-seed itself, but not invasively.
<b>Day Lily</b> <i>Hemerocallis</i> species	P	L,M	Plant in full sun, can take partial shade. Plant during any season. Regular water. Flowers are yellow, orange, red, and cream. Sturdy plant makes a great border addition.
<b>Japanese Honeysuckle</b> <i>Lonicera japonica</i> or <i>L. periclymenum</i>	P vine	T	Plant in full sun or partial shade during any season. Water-wise vine. Deep soak, do not water until soil is dry. Fragrant white and yellow flowers. <i>L. japonica</i> can be invasive. Plant <i>L. periclymenum</i> if you live near native areas. Prune back after danger of frost has passed.
<b>Petunia</b> <i>Petunia</i> species	A	L	Plant in full sun in spring or summer. Regular water. Purple, pink, white, red, and blue flowers. Can sometimes live through fall if weather stays mild.
<b>Yarrow</b> <i>Achillea</i> species	P	L,M	Plant in full sun in spring, summer or fall. Little water. Flowers are white, yellow, pink, and red. Cut back after bloom.

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## Nectar Plants for Adults

### *Summer Bloom*

Common & Botanical Name	Type	Height	Growing Tips
<b>Agapanthus</b> <i>Agapanthus</i> species	P	M	Plant in full sun or partial shade during any season. Little water. Flowers are white, blue or purple. Divide every 6 years. Also called "Lily of the Nile."
<b>Bee Balm</b> <i>Monarda didyma</i>	P	M	Plant in partial shade in spring. Regular water. Flowers are red, pink or purple and fragrant. Remove spent flowers for longer bloom time.
<b>Blazing Star</b> <i>Liatris spicata</i>	P	M	Plant bulbs in full sun in spring. Regular water. Flowers are bright purple and bloom from top down. Divide clumps in early spring and move to new location.
<b>Borage</b> <i>Borago officinalis</i>	A	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring. Little water. Flowers are blue with yellow centers. Tends to reseed itself, but not invasively.
<b>Butterfly Weed</b> <i>Asclepius tuberosa</i>	P	M	Plant in full sun in spring. Moderate water. Flowers are bright orange, red or yellow. Each year, new stems grow to form a clump. Prune in spring after danger of frost is past.
<b>Echinacea</b> <i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	P	M	Plant in full sun in spring or summer. Moderate water. Flowers are purple, pink or white with an orange-brown center. Flowering may continue until frost.
<b>Fennel</b> <i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	A	T	Plant in full sun in spring. Moderate water. Flowers are umbel-shaped and white. Perennial treated as an annual. Tends to reseed itself and can be invasive. This plant is well liked by butterflies.
<b>Lavender</b> <i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>	P	L, M	Plant in full sun during any season. Moderate water. Flowers are purple, pink or white. Blooms may repeat in fall if flowers are trimmed.

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## Nectar Plants for Adults

### *Summer until Frost Bloom*

Common & Botanical Name	Type	Height	Growing Tips
<b>Ageratum</b> <i>Ageratum houstonianum</i>	A	L	Plant in spring or summer in partial shade. Regular water. Flowers are blue, white, purple or pink. Most of these plants are low growing.
<b>Aster</b> <i>Aster</i> species	A	L	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring or summer. Regular water. Flowers are white, red, blue, pink, and purple with yellow center. There are over 600 aster species. Most live until fall.
<b>Black-Eyed Susan</b> <i>Rudbeckia hirta</i>	A	L	Plant in full sun in spring. Moderate water. Flowers orange yellow with purple cone-like centers. This plant is technically a short-lived perennial, but does better as an annual.
<b>Bluebeard</b> <i>Caryopteris</i> species	P shrub	M, T	Plant in full sun during any season. Moderate water. Flowers are blue. Cut to ground in late winter to early spring. Trim after flowering to encourage bloom.
<b>Butterfly Bush</b> <i>Buddleia davidii</i>	P shrub	T	Plant in full sun or partial shade during any season. Moderate water. Flowers are white, pink or purple. Flowers are fragrant. Growth habit is a tall, multi-stemmed shrub. Prune in spring after danger of frost is past.
<b>California Fuchsia</b> <i>Zauschenaria californicum</i>	P ground cover	L,M	Plant in full sun during any season. Little water. Flowers are tube like and red. Also attract hummingbirds. California native. After first year of growth, prune back in late fall or winter.
<b>Chaste Tree</b> <i>Vitex agnus-castus</i>	P tree	T	Plant in full sun during any season. Regular water. Flowers are purple and fragrant. Prune in early spring.
<b>Coreopsis</b> <i>Coreopsis</i> species	A, P	L, M	Plant in full sun in spring or summer. Little water. Flowers are yellow, orange, red or bi-colored. Tends to reseed itself but not invasively. Drought tolerant once established.
<b>Glossy Abelia</b> <i>Abelia x grandiflora</i>	P shrub	L, M	Plant in full sun or partial shade during any season. Regular water. Flowers are small and white. Height varies with cultivar chosen. This plant is evergreen.
<b>Heliotrope</b> <i>Heliotropium arborescens</i>	A	L	Plant in partial shade in spring or summer. Regular water. Perennial plant usually grown as an annual. Flowers are purple or white and very fragrant. They may live through winter if protected.
<b>Joe-Pye Weed</b> <i>Eupatorium</i> species	P	M,T	Plant in partial shade in spring. Regular water. Flowers are pink or purple. Leaves have a vanilla scent when crushed. Can get 3-9' tall.
<b>Mexican Sunflower</b> <i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i>	A	T	Plant in full sun in spring (usually available as seed only). Regular water. Flowers are bright orange and attractive to hummingbirds. Makes a good temporary hedge to protect butterflies.

# Butterfly Plant Guide

## Caterpillar Food

Butterfly	Flight Period	Plant	Growing Tips
<b>Cabbage White</b>	Jan-Dec	Broccoli and especially cabbage	Plant in late summer from seed, or early fall from 6 packs available at nurseries. Plant enough for yourself and these voracious caterpillars! This butterfly can be considered a pest.
		Wild Mustard or Black Mustard	This is technically a weed and can be seen in vacant lots and sometimes gardens. The botanical name is <i>Brassica kabera</i> (wild mustard) or <i>Brassica nigra</i> (black mustard). It's doubtful you will be able to find a seed source unless you can harvest it from a plant.
<b>Clouded Sulphur</b>	June-Nov	Clover Alfalfa	Purchase clover as seed. Alfalfa may be available at a farm supply store. Keep soil moist until seeds sprout and become established. Both are perennials and are evergreen throughout the year.
<b>Fiery Skipper</b>	April-Nov	Grasses like bermudagrass and crabgrass	Bermudagrass can be purchased as seed. Plant in full sun. Goes dormant in winter but greens up in spring. Remember to keep it contained as the stolons (roots) can easily spread to other parts of your garden. Crabgrass is a weed you may find in your lawn.
<b>Monarch</b>	Jan-Mar Sept-Nov	Milkweed plants <i>Asclepias species</i>	Plant in full sun in spring. Moderate water. Over 150 species of milkweed plants exist, many native to North and South America. <i>A. tuberosa</i> , which has orange, star-shaped flowers (butterfly weed) is often sold at nurseries. Other species may be found online from Butterfly Encounters.com.
<b>Mourningcloak</b>	Jan-Dec	Willow <i>Salix species</i>	Plant in full sun during any season . Regular water. Most have invasive root systems that are difficult to garden under. All need regular water. <i>S. discolor</i> is native to eastern U.S.
		American Elm <i>Ulmus americana</i>	Plant in full sun during any season . Regular water. This is the plant that fell prey to Dutch Elm disease in the 1930's and 40's. There are two disease resistant types, 'Princeton' and 'Valley Forge.'
		Chinese Elm <i>Ulmus Parvifolia</i>	Plant in full sun during any season. Regular water. Fast growth to 40-60' tall and nearly as wide. They have an aggressive root system that is difficult to garden under. Tree has picturesque, puzzle-piece like bark.

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## Caterpillar Food

Butterfly	Flight Period	Plant	Growing Tips
<b>Mourningcloak (cont'd)</b>		Birch <i>Betula</i> species	Plant in full sun during any season . Regular water. Grows quickly, then slower. Can reach 30-40' tall, 15-20' wide. Good lawn tree if given deep water. Avoid planting near cement as susceptibility to aphid damage causes sticky, honeydew drip.
		Hackberry <i>Celtis</i> species	Plant in full sun or partial shade during any season. Moderate water. Roots are well-behaved, so trees can be grown near pavement. Prone to aphids that can cause sticky, honeydew drip.
		Poplar and Cottonwood <i>Populus</i> species	Plant in full sun during any season. Regular water. Fast growing trees with aggressive roots that compete with pavement and other plants as well as sewer lines. Attractive fall color. <i>S. fremontii</i> is native to California.
<b>Painted Lady</b>	Jan-Oct	Borage <i>Borago</i> <i>officinalis</i>	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring. Little water. Flowers are blue with yellow centers. Annual plant tends to reseed itself, but not invasively.
		Hollyhock <i>Alcea rosea</i>	Plant in full sun or partial shade in spring (6 packs) or late summer (seed). Regular water. Tall biennial is often treated as an annual. May come back from seed on its own, or save seeds and replant.
		Thistle Cheeseweed Nettle Fiddleneck	These plants are weeds that can be found in vacant lots and sometimes gardens. It's doubtful you will be able to find a seed source unless you can harvest it from a plant.
<b>Red Admiral</b>	Mar-April Oct-Nov	Baby's Tears <i>Soleirolia</i> <i>soleirolii</i>	Plant in partial shade during any season. Regular water. This perennial groundcover roots easily and can be invasive in wet areas. Cannot be walked on without damaging plant.
		Nettle	See information above.
<b>Western Tiger Swallowtail</b>	Jan-Sept	Alder <i>Alnus</i> species	Plant in full sun or partial shade during any season. Regular water. Fast growing tree tolerates wet soil. Height varies by species, but in general are at least 45' tall or taller.
		Ash <i>Fraxinus</i> species	Plant in full sun during any season. Water needs vary by species. Most have trouble with aphids, which leads to a sticky honeydew that drips on sidewalk and cars.

# Butterfly Plant Guide

## Caterpillar Food

Butterfly	Flight Period	Plant	Growing Tips
<b>Western Tiger Swallowtail (cont'd)</b>	Jan-Sept	Poplar and Cottonwood <i>Populus</i> species	Plant in full sun during any season. Regular water. Fast growing trees with aggressive roots that compete with pavement and other plants as well as sewer lines. Attractive fall color. <i>S. fremontii</i> is native to California.
		Tulip Tree <i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>	Plant in full sun during any season. Fast growing tree to 80' tall, 40' wide. Regular water. Does well as a shade or lawn tree. Difficult to garden under because it casts such a dense shade. Prone to aphid infestations. Native to the Eastern U.S.
		Willow <i>Salix</i> species	Plant in full sun during any season. Regular water. Most have invasive root systems that are difficult to garden under. All need regular water. <i>S. discolor</i> is native to eastern U.S.

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