Now is a perfect time to add "flying flowers" to your garden. It takes very little effort, and you, and especially any children in the area, are sure to delight in this colorful new dimension in your garden.

Two types of plants are needed to encourage butterflies: those that provide nectar (the food that keeps them flying) and those that provide a breeding facility. Most butterflies are active only in the sun, so it is no surprise that they choose both nectar and "host" plants that require sunny habitats. When both types are planted nearby, you not only draw in the butterflies to feed on the nectar but you also help ensure that a new generation will appear.

Nectar plants often hide their sweet juices deep within the flower, but the beautifully crafted proboscis on a butterfly can easily delve deeply into the flowers. When searching for food, butterflies are easily drawn to local native flowers such as passionflower, coneflowers and joe-pye-weed. Non-native plants are also a good draw: butterfly bush, lantana and Mountain pink (ground phlox) are a few cultivars whose blooms are often covered with butterflies. They drink their fill; and when it's time to reproduce, the adult butterfly seeks out a host plant on which to lay its eggs.

When the eggs hatch into caterpillars, they get busy devouring the leaves of the host plant. As they grow, caterpillars shed their skin five times and eventually turn into a chrysalis. It is in this chrysalis that the magic happens and the caterpillar, through metamorphosis, emerges as the adult butterfly.

Host plants for the black swallowtail butterfly include common herbs such as parsley, dill, and fennel. These plants are often eaten away, only to regrow for a second cycle of caterpillars. That is why it is often said, "If you want some parsley to eat, plant an extra one for the butterflies." Many of the flowers we consider to be weeds are favorites of the butterfly. These include yellow thistle (Cirsium horridulum), wild indigo (Baptisia tinctoris), violets, clovers, and pussytoes.

Of all the possible plants, it is milkweed that is the favorite of the Monarch butterfly. This amazing creature migrates 2,500 miles to the mountains of Mexico.* On the way south in the fall or back in the spring, they find host plants of the milkweed family on which to deposit their eggs. These in turn produce the butterflies that will continue the journey. To encourage Monarchs to your garden, you can plant tropical milkweed (Asclepias curassavica) and local natives such as swamp milkweed (Asclepias incarnata), common milkweed (Asclepias syriacea), and butterfly weed (Asclepias tuberosa). But one word of warning: milkweed can be invasive with an urge to crop up wherever it pleases.

The choice of nectar and host plants for attracting butterflies is up to you, but plant them and they will come.

*The authors of this article participated in a migration study done by the University of Toronto and both are avid gardeners who plant for butterflies.
Monthly Gardening Activities
By Susan Strine

- Keep newly planted trees and shrubs consistently moist throughout the dry summer months. Those planted two or three years ago may need watering during extended dry periods.

- Remove the leaves of spring bulbs when they turn brown. Wait until then because the leaves convert sunlight to food and help store energy in the bulb for next year. Now is a good time to divide overgrown iris since a compacted clump will produce fewer and smaller blooms.

- Fertilize roses after each flush of bloom. Watch for signs of mildew or black spot and treat with a fungicide. Japanese beetles will begin showing up soon. The best way to control them is to take a bowl of soapy water and hold it under them as you knock them off the leaves into the bowl.

- Continue planting perennials and annuals. Pinch back mums to produce more compact plants.

- Insects started showing up early this year. There are good and bad bugs. When you treat with a general insecticide, you can kill both, eventually causing a worse problem with the bad insects. Damage from red spider mites can be limited by spraying the plant with a strong spray from a garden hose.

- Continue planting warm-season vegetables into early June. To avoid certain pests and diseases, wait until late June to plant peas and fall tomatoes.

- Prune azaleas and other spring bloomers following bloom. Finish pruning other evergreens this month for height control and to shape.

What’s Bugging You?
By Sandy McShea

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When I think of slugs, I think of hostas, but slugs have a wider appetite than that. They feed on many garden vegetables, ornamentals and commercial crops: lettuce, strawberries, tomatoes, and impatiens. The list goes on and on. Telltale signs of a slug in residence include ragged holes and silvery lines of slime. On young plants, slugs can do even more damage than just eating leaves. They consume entire plants. Most slug damage occurs at night.

Adult slugs are soft-bodied, wormlike animals that are members of the same zoological group as clams, mussels, scallops and snails. They come in a variety of colors (brown, gray, black, tan, green and even yellow) and camouflage markings.

Slug eggs can be found in jelly masses under stones and debris. They grow for five months to two years before reaching maturity.

One way to do away with slugs is to clean up the garden of old leaves, fallen branches, pots, etc. to remove slug breeding and daytime hiding places. Since mulch makes a great hiding place for slugs, don’t spread it until plants are well established and then be sure the depth of the mulch doesn’t exceed three inches. Encourage predatory beetles by maintaining walkways of clover, sod or stone mulch.

Slugs can be trapped, hand picked, baited or sprayed with pesticides. Just be sure to use caution when using pesticides in a vegetable garden. Before resorting to chemicals, why not try a home remedy or two. Shallow dishes of beer lure slugs to a happy death. Homemade sprays of vinegar and water also do the trick. Soft-bellied slugs don’t like to crawl over rough surfaces. Sawdust, egg shells, gravel, diatomaceous earth and ash spread around the base of a plant should deter slug visits. Slugs also dislike copper, which gives them an electrical shock. Copper strips can be used as a barrier to prevent slugs from entering the garden.

Unfortunately, whatever method is chosen, battling slugs requires persistence.
Plant of the Month: The Strawberry

By Sandy McShea

With the state of the economy and general concern regarding the food we eat, kitchen gardening is much in vogue. In my little, much too shady “potager” in Vass, one crop that I have found to flourish is the strawberry.

Generally, strawberry plants will bear fruit in a year and remain productive for several years if tended properly. Two or three years ago I planted just a few little plants. They continue to produce and multiply. To provide the good drainage and full sun they require, I grow my strawberries in raised beds and fertilize them with seasoned compost. I use no chemicals for weed or bug control and add no fertilizer. I have to compete with the birds, but I still have plenty.

Mulching around the plants with clean straw helps keep the berries off the soil and seems to make the fruit less interesting to bugs. It also helps to retain precious moisture in the soil. Consistent watering is needed as strawberries are not drought tolerant.

In the fall, I cut my strawberry plants back severely and cover them with more mulch. This helps control insect infestation and has allowed my strawberry gardens to produce much longer than the two to four year average.

God made rainy days so gardeners could get the housework done.

~Author Unknown

Recipe of the Month

By Kathy Peterson RD, LDN

Forget the Georgia peach. North Carolina peaches are just as mouth-watering and delightful as their Southern neighbors. And there are peach growers in our backyard that are flourishing with product this season.

This sweet and juicy fruit attracts our palette with its flavor, but the peach is much more than produce. Peaches are full of nutrients that may be beneficial for eye health, blood pressure, and digestive regularity. Antioxidants known for prevention of aging and cancer are also found in the flesh and skin of peaches. There is no negative to this fruit, so it should be part of a healthy lifestyle.

Add a twist to your next meal or snack by preparing a sweet and spicy salsa with peaches.

Peach Salsa

Ingredients

- 4 medium peaches, peeled and diced
- Juice of 2 limes (about 1/4 cup)
- 1 t. honey
- 1/4 c. diced red bell pepper
- 1 t. finely minced jalapeno pepper
- 1 T. chopped cilantro
- 1 small clove garlic, finely minced
- 2 T. finely chopped red onion

Makes approximately 4 servings

Preparation

Combine all ingredients and refrigerate until serving time. The flavors are best if the salsa is refrigerated overnight. Serve with grilled fish, meat, poultry or pair with cinnamon sugar pita chips for a refreshing appetizer.

Nutrition Facts Per 1/2 cup Serving: Calories 73, Fat 0gm, Carbohydrates <13gm, Fiber 3gm, Protein <1gm.

There can be no other occupation like gardening in which, if you were to creep up behind someone at their work, you would find them smiling.

~Mirabel Osler
Moore County Farmers Market
Producer only ~ fresh and locally grown

Mondays
FirstHealth (Fitness Center)
April 16 - October 29
2 pm - 6 pm

Thursdays
Morganton Rd (Armory Sports Complex)
April 19 - October 25
9 am - 1 pm
Winter Season: November thru March

Saturdays
Downtown Southern Pines
April 21 - October 27
8 am - noon

Sandhills Farmers Green Market
"Fresh and locally grown fruit and vegetables at a convenient location"

Tuesdays
Sandhills Community College (Aristotle Parking Lot)
April 24 - May 8 and August 21 - September 29
10 am - 1 pm

Wednesdays and Saturdays
Pinehurst Village Green Sandlot
April 24 - September 29
9 am - 1 pm

Don’t miss our next edition in July 2012.
For additional copies of this and past newsletter issues, go to ces.ncsu.edu and search for “Dig This.”

Disclaimer: Dig This is produced by the Moore County Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) in conjunction with the NC Extension Service. Its purpose is to share with the general public some of the MGV’s enthusiasm for gardening and some of their activities. The information contained herein is based on sources that the Master Gardener Volunteers believe to be reliable, but they do not represent that the information herein is accurate or complete.