



BUTTERFLY BOX

Installation and Management Instructions

Introduction

In nature, butterflies seek shelter under trees, leaves, fences, and by hiding in vegetation and under house eaves. Using a butterfly box mimics these hide-out spots by providing a refuge from poor weather and predators and an overwintering site [1]. There are two butterfly species of special concern in Ontario: the Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) and West Virginia White (*Pieris virginiensis*). A common threat to both species is habitat loss and fragmentation.

Established in 1995, the Trilateral Committee of Wildlife and Ecosystem Conservation and Management focuses on cooperative conservation efforts amongst Canada, U.S.A and Mexico. An example of these efforts is the protection of Monarch Butterfly habitat across these three countries [2]. In Canada and the U.S.A., one step currently underway is the protection of the Monarch caterpillar food source, plants in the Milkweed (*Asclepias*) genus. The application of herbicides has drastically decreased the availability of Milkweed. Therefore government and environmental agencies are encouraging farmers and landowners to avoid spraying herbicides, specifically those with glyphosate, which kills most plants. Similarly, the West Virginia White butterfly is also threatened. Caterpillars of this species feed only on plants in the toothwort (*Brassicaceae*) family and lay eggs on these plants so their offspring will be able to feed. However, the invasive Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) plant also attracts females. West Virginia White butterflies will lay their eggs on Garlic Mustard, but once hatched the larvae will not feed on the plant and thus die.

Butterfly Box Construction

Design: Boxes will either open from the side or top, varying on the design, which allows for accessibility for both cleaning and maintenance.

Entrance Hole: A butterfly house has long, narrow slots rather than a round hole. These slots allow butterflies access to the house while keeping predators such as birds, out.



Painting: In North America, butterflies have a preference for the colors purple, pink, yellow, white, blue and red. Therefore, you can paint the exterior of your box a variety of colors and or designs if you choose. Ensure that if you choose to paint your butterfly box you use non-toxic paints and or finishes.

Mounting Butterfly Box

- Boxes should be mounted on a pole or a tree 4 feet (1.21m) off the ground

Butterfly Box Location and Placement

Habitat Preferences: It is a good idea to have butterfly host plants and nectar sources close by. Depending on the species of Butterflies you are trying to attract, examples of host plants include: Willow, Elm, Nettles and Hops. Examples of nectar sources include: Asters, Milkweed, Phlox, Purple Coneflower, and Wild Bergamot.

Placement of Boxes: Having nest boxes facing away from prevailing winds as well as in partial shaded areas are the optimal placement.

Monitoring and Maintenance

Monitoring: You can check butterfly box once every 2-3 months, but do not disturb it during late fall or winter when it may be occupied.

NOTE: Adding a layer of bark, twigs, moss at the bottom of the butterfly box can encourage occupancy, however ensure to leave the entrance slots unobstructed.

Maintenance: Clean your box once a year prior to fall. Don't be discouraged if you don't get immediate occupancy as this can take some time. Butterflies seek shelter in the fall when temperatures begin to drop.

Keep us informed on the success of the structure and share with us on our facebook page!

References & Further Information

1. Mikula, Rick. (2001). Garden Butterflies of North America: A Gallery of Garden Butterflies & How to Attract Them. Willow Creek Press
2. Monarch Butter. World Wildlife Federation (WWF). (2011). http://www.wwf.ca/conservation/species/monarch_butterfly/

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