



## Living Jewels

Some of the colors seen in our gardens can be attributed to the large variety of butterflies that visit our nectary flowers. Our gardens come alive with these colorful insects that delight the eye and the soul with images that remind us of our childhoods.

The spectacular swallowtails, with the black and yellow contrasting stripes on their wings, dine on the nectar provided by the many varieties of flowers that we grow. The butterfly flutters delicately as it passes from one flower to another, pausing just long enough to take a sip of the sweet liquid the plant offers. Its large size makes it an attention getter!

White cabbage and veined-whites flit around plants of the mustard family, looking for suitable places on leaves to deposit their eggs which will become the next generation of vivid white butterflies.

Orange and black mottled fritillaries also add some striking color to the picture. The undersides of their wings have creamy or silver spots, and when they alight they truly appear to living jewelry. The larvae feed on violets of various species. If you want to attract more of them, a patch of violets somewhere in the garden can do wonders.

Small blue butterflies add another dimension to the mix, flying among the flowers and becoming a sky-blue contrast to the other garden visitors. The life histories of some of these blues are even more spectacular. Some species larvae are actually cared for by ants, offering protection and food for the developing caterpillar. The caterpillar pupates in the ant hill, and upon hatching, crawls out of the opening, spreads its wings and flies away.

Small orange and black skippers move with great speed among the flowers and above your lawn. These one inch wingspan creatures look like a cross between a butterfly and a moth. In fact, at rest, the skipper holds its front wings up like a butterfly and the hind wings more horizontal like a moth. The larvae feed on grasses and are curious in that they have a constricted collar around their neck. Sort of reminds one of formal wear on an insect!

If you have a patch of nettles nearby, you probably will see the colorful red admiral butterfly visiting your garden. They have a black-brown ground color with white and orange contrasts. The most spectacular color, though, is the bright red stripe crossing the forewings. In Europe the name is a little different. There it is called the red admirable, and truly, when sighted, is an admirable thing to behold!

As you work in the garden this summer, keep an eye out for the living jewels that come to visit. You will be delighted by their presence, and you will feel like you are witnessing the "crown jewels" on the wing.

Happy gardening!

