

Moth gardens offer beautiful night show

BY DEAN FOSDICK
The Associated Press

NEW MARKET, Va. — Any one working the night shift knows it can be an out-of-sight, out-of-mind kind of experience. You sleep when you can and socialize as you can. And so it is with many insects, like the much-maligned moth.

The moth is primarily a creature of the night — seldom noticed, therefore little regarded when compared with its more visible daytime cousin, the butterfly.

Butterflies seem to reap the glory although moths do as much, if not more, to help your garden grow.

Moths transfer pollen from flower to flower; some produce silk and still others add dramatic splashes of color to your yard provided you don't mind seeking them out in the darkness.

All that disrespect exists despite the population dynamics — moths greatly exceed butterfly species in the order Lepidoptera.

"In North America, about 750 butterfly species are recognized and about 10,500 moth species," said John Snyder, a biology professor at Furman University in Greenville, S.C.

Some adult moths are as small as mosquitoes while others grow larger than bats, wingtip to wingtip.

"The vast majority are small or brownish-gray in color," said Snyder. "But others are not. Some are gorgeous animals. I've seen virtually every color of moth."

Butterfly gardens are the rage, nationwide, but when was the last time you were invited to tour a moth garden?

"It's not the conventional way to garden, so I don't know many people who do," said Janet Marinelli, director of publications for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in New York.

Marinelli is an equal opportunity Lepidoptera gardener. She plants flowers for both butterflies and moths. But while butterflies are attracted primarily to colors, moths respond more strongly to fragrances.



AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews

Above, the Luna moth is shown in a garden this spring in New Market, Va. Moths transfer pollen from flower to flower; some produce silk and still others add dramatic splashes of color to your yard.

"Basically, there are some general rules about such things as moth gardens," said Marinelli. "Most moths fly at night so luminous light (colored) or luminous green flowers attract them. Also flowers with a great scent. People doing studies have discovered moths cover an amazing distance following odors."

More than 900 yards, actually.

If you want adult moths frequenting your yard, then you might try cultivating plants considered appetizing by their offspring — so-called larvae plants.

"Giant silk moths don't eat at all as adults," said Marinelli. "They just live to mate. The larval stage is usually where they do the (leaf) cutting."

"The same with butterflies: The adults just go around looking beautiful. Caterpillars do all the munching."

Despite the garden good they can do, moths are not without their critics. Need I mention the liberal use of mothballs by the world's wool sock collective? Still, Snyder believes much of

that criticism is undeserved.

"For all their great numbers, moths turn out very, very few pests," he said. "Only a few hundred (species) concern the agricultural entomologists in that they'll attack crops."

"The vast majority eat only what we call weeds. Virtually every species of plant will attract moths or their larvae."

Most gardeners seem to favor attracting sphinx or hawk moths, the giant silkworm or royal moths or the tiger moth varieties.

Sphinx moths (Family Sphingidae) grow medium to large with elongated forewings. Their bodies tend to be thick and they usually have a long proboscis — what biologists call "a drinking straw kind of tongue" — enabling them to draw nectar from deep-throated flowers.

An example includes the hummingbird clearwing moth which, because of its size, darting flight patterns and ability to hover, often is mistaken for its namesake bird.

Silkworm moths (Family

Saturniidae) also run medium to large, have prominent antennae and thick bodies covered with hairlike scales, Snyder says. Luna, Polyphemus and Chinati sheepsheeps are among the silkworm color guard.

Tiger moths (Family Arctiidae) are frequently bright in color, with distinctive markings on their wings and body.

The Black-edged Prominent and Great Tiger moth are noteworthy members of this family.

Flowers favored by moths include four o'clocks (Mirabilis Jalapa), blazing stars (Mentzelia lindleyi), flowering tobacco (Nicotiana glauca), night blooming jasmine (Cestrum nocturnum) and narrowleaf evening primrose (Oenothera fruticosa). All are fragrant and all are nocturnal bloomers.

Certain plants have proven to attract both butterflies and moths, notably lilacs, viburnum, phlox, vincas, petunias, blackberry and thistles.

"As long as they're open day and night and contain nectar," said Marinelli.



AP Photo/Dean Fossdick

Above, Janet Marinelli, publications director for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, looks at a Queen of the Prairie plant during a tour at the garden in New York in June. The plant, also known as Meadow Sweet, is among plants Marinelli grows in her private garden to attract butterflies, moths and other pollinating creatures.

Proper insulation should prevent mildew

BY MORRIS AND JAMES CAREY
The Associated Press

Insulation is important, but condensation and mildew are a result of the radical difference between inside and outside temperatures. What's the deal?

Insulating effectively is a key to maintaining a comfortable temperature in your home without paying an arm and a leg to the utility company.

Once a home is properly insulated, it is important to create internal air circulation, and controlled ventilation.

Mildew-causing moisture resulting from condensation — most apparent on windows and toilet tanks, but also existing in walls, ceilings and floors — can be eliminated by causing the air in the home to circulate from room to room.

Allowing hot air to stay

at the ceiling will not solve moisture problems at floor level. A forced-air furnace will move the air around, but if you depend on convection heating from a wall-mounted unit to do the job, you may have a problem. Ceiling fans, as well as the tabletop portable type, will do much to increase air circulation. Normal heat exchange occurring at well-ventilated attics (and sub-areas) will not help as much when there are heavy layers of insulation in place, but will help keep moisture to a minimum. Steam vapors must not be allowed to congregate.

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