

Selected Butterfly Host Plant List with Habitat & Nectar Notes

For Butterfly Workshop -- October, 2023

By Betsy Washington

| Species | Caterpillar Host Plants | Habitat - Nectar Notes |
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| Swallowtails, <i>Papilionidae</i> | | Early instars mimic bird droppings, older instars are smooth and brightly colored, all have fleshy retractable organs (Osmeterium) above head that give off pungent odor when threatened. Some have eyespots. |
| Pipevine Swallowtail | Virginia Snakeroot, Dutchman's Pipe Caterpillars accumulate toxic chemicals from host plants that deter predators. | Deciduous woodlands, edges, dry or moist, grasslands where hosts and nectar sources occur. Some nectar sources are Wild Bergamot, lilac, azaleas, phlox, verbenas, lantana, petunias, milkweeds & more |
| Spicebush Swallowtail | Spicebush, Sassafras, Red Bay (aromatic Laurel Family w/aromatic foliage) Young instar Caterpillars mimic bird droppings; Older have large eyespots mimicking snakes, live in folded leaf shelters | Open woodlands and edges, Nectar from Jewelweed, thistles, milkweed, dogbane, azalea, lantana, sweet pepperbush and more |
| Black Swallowtail | Carrots, Parsley, Dill, Queen Anne's Lace, Golden Alexanders All contain carotenoids - phytochemicals | Fields, meadows, gardens. Tidal marshes - where hosts occur. Nectar on wide variety of flowers – red clover, milkweeds, thistles, composites, & more |
| Eastern Tiger Swallowtail | Tulip Poplar, Black Cherry, Sweetbay Magnolia, Birch Caterpillars feed on leaves and rest on silk mats on top of leaves. Countershading helps them blend into leaf color. | Deciduous woodlands near edges and watercourses, often in suburban gardens. Nectar from wide variety of plants: Black Cherry, Lilac, Milkweed, Joe-Pye Weed, Purple coneflowers , Sweet Pepperbush, Mt Mints + |
| Zebra Swallowtail | Pawpaw Adults fly in understory near host plants, especially along water-courses and lay eggs on undersides of new leaves. Cats prefer new foliage | Adults seek moisture from sand & nectar from flowers including blueberry, blackberry, lilac, redbud, verbena, dogbane, purple coneflowers, and milkweeds. |

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| Whites and Sulphurs, <i>Pieridae Family</i> | | Often treated as agricultural pests and harmed by pesticides. Large family of cryptically colored caterpillars |
| <i>Whites Subfamily</i> | Hosts are mostly Mustards. Seeds and flowers of host plants are main food. | Early instars are usually dull yellow-green, getting patterns as they mature but blending in with host plants they feed on.. |
| Cabbage White | Brassicas: mustard, cabbage, kale, broccoli. | Non-native. Considered an agricultural pest and populations have declined because of pesticides. |
| Falcate Orangetip | Cresses in genus <i>Arabis</i> (rock cresses) including Spring & Winter Cresses & <i>Cardamine</i> spp. (toothworts). Non-native Field Rape, Mustards in later spring. Woodland host plants available only in spring so out only in early spring. | Woodland edges and openings in early spring. Hosts occur along streams & rich woods. Adults nectar on variety of early bloomers including flowers of early hosts, violets, spring beauty. |
| <i>Sulphur Subfamily</i> | Feed primarily on Legumes, prefer eating leaves but some flowers and buds. | Caterpillars vary but usually green with lateral stripe. |
| Cloudless Sulphur | Partridge Pea, Wild Sennas and Sicklepods, Soybeans, Baptisia | Open areas, fields, disturbed areas where hosts are found. Migrates south in large waves in winter and north in late spring-summer. Adults have long tongues & can feed on tubular flowers. Attracted to red flowers but use wide variety of nectar. |
| Clouded Sulphur | Partridge Pea, Alfalfa, White Clover, Peas | Open, sunny areas, fields with clover & alfalfa, roadsides, gardens, meadows. Nectar on a wide variety of flowers. |
| Sleepy Orange | Partridge Peas, Wild Sennas, Sicklepod | Open areas, roadsides, fields. In wooded areas early in spring before nectar plants emerge in open fields. Nectars on blue mistflowers, goldenrods, asters and others. |

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| GOSSAMER WINGS, LYCAENIDAE | | |
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| | Primarily feed on buds, flowers, and fruits of host plants and adopt color of plant part they are feeding on making them hard to find. Some bore into fruits to feed, and others nest in leaf litter below host trees. | Slug like caterpillars with variable coloring to blend with host plant. Most tended by ants which get honeydew for caterpillars and protect them from predators. Look for ants! |
| <i>Hairstreak Subfamily</i> | Some species eat flowers and fruit, others feed on leaves. Early fliers overwinter as chrysalis. | Small heads retract into slug-like bodies, setae cover bodies. Release honeydew to attract protective ants. |
| Red-banded Hairstreak | Buds and leaves of Wax Myrtle and Winged Sumac (<i>R. copallina</i>), and to lesser extent <i>R. typhina</i> and Oaks. Observed feeding on rotting host leaves on ground. | Meadows w/ wildflowers, woodland edges/openings, near shorelines w/ wax myrtles. Easy to attract to gardens w/ goldenrod, mints, Mt Mints & others. |
| Henry's Elfin | Varied and specific by locale, redbuds, American hollies, winterberries feeding primarily on flowerbuds (blueberries and buckthorns in other areas) – | Variety of woodlands and understories where hosts grow. One brood in spring. |
| Eastern-tailed Blue | Legumes, lawn clovers, especially White Clover, Partridge-pea, Alfalfa, Wild Sensitive Plant, Vetch. NO MOW MAY! | Widespread in open areas, especially disturbed. Flies low and weakly . Tends to congregate in groups in moist areas near streams, ponds instead of puddling. Plant low nectar plants & add mud puddles to attract. |
| Azures (Taxonomy is confused, often identified by host plants, time of flight). | Extremely varied, but in East mostly Dogwoods, also Blackhaw & other Viburnums, Black Cherries, N.J. Tea, Blueberries. Shrubby Dogwoods in summer. | "Everywhere"; deciduous woodlands, edges, openings, roadsides, gardens, and parks. Tiny, flutter up and down to hosts, in open areas. |

| BRUSH-FOOTED BUTTERFLIES, NYMPHALIDAE FAMILY | | |
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| Variegated Fritillary | Violets (Common Blue, Bird's Foot, Field/Wild Pansy) And Passion Flower | Open situations, milkweeds, Mints like Mountain Mints, Beebalm, sunflowers, many goldenrods, Joe-pye- |

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| | | weeds, other nectar-rich flowers. |
| Common Buckeye | Caterpillars feed on buds, leaves of huge variety of hosts: Vervain, Purple False Foxglove (Gerardia), Speedwells, frog-fruits, Snapdragons | Open or disturbed areas, meadows, marshes for frog-fruit. Many nectar-rich flowers. Adults love watermelon! |
| Pearl Crescent | Asters - Calico, Frost, New England, Blue Wood Aster | Common in open sunny areas, gardens. Some favored nectar sources are Milkweeds, Purple coneflowers, Black-eyed susans, Coreopsis. |
| American Lady | Pearly Everlastings, Pussytoes, Cudweeds. Make web of silken hairs on hairy leaves/ | Common garden butterfly feeding on butterfly weeds, joe-pye weed, coneflowers and many others. |
| Hackberry Emperor | As the name implies, host plant sare Hackberries. In our area Common Hackberry. Prefer leaf buds and young leaves. | Adults rarely nectar at flowers; they seek out rotting fruit, sap, dung, dirt, and are noted from being attracted to perspiring humans! Adults often perch head down on tree trunk or other structures. |
| Monarch | Milkweeds, especially Swamp Milkweed lay eggs on young growth, Sandvine/Honeyvine | Adults love milkweed which are nectar rich (plant lots!) but also many other nectar-rich flowers. Fall Goldenrods and Asters are important to sustain fall migration south. |
| Viceroy | Willows, Cottonwood, Black Cherry. Caterpillars store salicylic acid from willow family hosts as a <i>chemical defense</i> . Larvae mimic bird droppings and hide in leaf shelters. | Prefer wet habitats along streams, rivers and ponds where its hosts occur along banks. Adults prefer composite flowers but also feed on rotten fruit, carrion and feces, especially early in spring. |

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| Red-spotted Purple | Caterpillars feed on foliage of a wide variety of deciduous trees and shrubs, including willows, wild cherry, apple, hawthorn, crab apples, and Serviceberries | The adults visit flowers, but they prefer to absorb moisture and nutrients from puddles, damp ground, decaying fruit, and animal droppings. Love over-ripe watermelon, figs! |
| American Snout | Hackberries, deciduous woodlands edges and near watercourses, streams near host plants. Feed on young leaves. | Often abundant after summer. Adults overwinter so often seen in spring and periodically through fall. Attracted to rotting fruit, nectar from dogbane, asters, goldenrods, mountain mints, etc. |
| Questionmark | Hosts include Hackberries, Elms, and nettles and hops. Deciduous forests near water, streams floodplains, where hosts occur. Overwinter as adults and have two broods, spring- early summer and late summer. | Adults often hidden in niches in bark or along tree trunks. Prefer tree sap, rotting fruit, dung to nectar. |
| SKIPPERS, HESPERIDAE FAMILY | | |
| | | Nearly all caterpillars hide in folded leaf nests on hosts. |
| Spread-wing Subfamily | Caterpillars of this varied subfamily generally feed on Legumes, Mallows, or Oaks and other trees. | Adults usually hold wings open |
| Silver-spotted Skipper | Legumes – generalist on them – even kudzu! Black Locusts, Honey Locusts, American Wisteria, Partridge-pea, Sennas, False Indigo-bush, Kudzu, Tick Trefoils | Widespread in woodland edges and open areas, common in gardens, feeding on variety of flowers. Love Verbenas. |
| Juvenal's Duskywing | Oaks (White, Red, Southern Red, Swamp Chestnut) especially tender young leaves Spring only | Woodland trail openings near Oaks. Adults nectar on spring wildflowers in woodlands. |
| Grass-Skipper Subfamily | Mostly feed on grasses and sedges – best habitat often is to let patches of lawn grow intermingled with wildflowers | Adults usually hold wings closed or in V-shape |

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| Fiery Skipper | Bermuda grass, Crab Grasses, St. Augustine Grass. Caterpillars make folded leaf shelters placed horizontally in sod. | Grassy areas, lawns, roadsides. Adults love Verbena, also sweet pepperbush, milkweeds, asters, sneezeweed, ironweed, thistles. |
| Sachem | Bermuda grass, crabgrasses Nests at base of hosts | Open disturbed fields, roadsides, barrens, gardens Variety of nectar plants and lantana |
| Zabulon Skipper | Purpletop, Purple Lovegrass & other Lovegrasses, Wild Rye, others | Moist woodland edges, openings, fields, gardens. Nectar from a variety of flowers including, red clover, selfheal & blackberry, milkweeds, buttonbush, joe-pye-weed, thistles |
| Long-tailed Skipper | Shrubby and vining Legumes: Wild and cultivated beans, butterfly peas, ground nut | Open fields, woodland edges, especially disturbed brushy areas. Near vegetable gardens with beans! |
| Ocola Skipper | Aquatic and Semi-aquatic grasses: Giant Plumegrass (Saccharum), Rice Cut Grass, Asian Rice | Open moist areas near host plants, meadows, damp ditches. Visits gardens, nectar-rich flowers |