

# Bay Friendly Yards: Creating a Butterfly Garden

Bugs are the cornerstone of the food web including the stunning Monarch Butterfly. Unfortunately, in developing Long Island over the past century, we have destroyed much of their natural habitat, reducing their ability to migrate and pollinate. With fewer bugs to eat, there has also been a drastic decline in the bird population, with some estimates at nearly 3 billion birds less today than in the 1970s. Wildlife needs a place to land on their long journeys. But they are, in fact, particular guests and are in need of compatible host plants and adequate foraging sources.

How can you help? By creating a Bay Friendly Yard butterfly garden in your own backyard. Each patch restored, no matter how big or small, adds to a patchwork of landing pads needed to support our local birds and insect populations. By restoring native habitat, your yard will not only come alive with beautiful native species, but also with a wide array of colorful visitors for your enjoyment.

How does one create a butterfly garden? There are three easy steps.

## #1 Check your soil, water, sun

Soil texture, water levels & sun exposure all determine what plants will do well. A straightforward analysis of your yard will help you easily determine what type of soil you have (sandy, rocky etc), if your soil is damp or dry, and how much sun the area you are seeking to restore receives every day. If you are a coastal property, choose species that are salt-tolerant such as Beach Plum and Seaside Goldenrod. For inland yards, plants that do well in drier soils are great choices such as Joe-Pye and Milkweed. Pick up a simple three-way meter tool at your local hardware store to help you.

## #2 Find or plant an anchor

Trees are an important element in any Bay Friendly Yard but not every tree provides the same ecological value. When choosing trees, keep in mind that certain native trees play host to more species of caterpillars than others, for example Oaks (521 species), Beach Plums (455 species), Willows (431 species) and Birch trees (410 species), providing

maximum restorative value and making them garden rock stars!

The same holds true for plants. Goldenrod plays host to 138 species of caterpillars while Wild Strawberries (84), Swamp Sunflower (78) and Joe Pye (35) are what we call a hostess to the mostest. You can easily identify native species at the National Wildlife Federation's native plant finder at <https://www.nwf.org/nativeplantfinder/>. Simply enter your zipcode to find a listing of plants native to the area.



## #3 Choose plants for functional beauty

When choosing plants for your butterfly garden, it is important to plan for seasonal color to ensure a beautiful display throughout the Spring and Summer and into the Fall. Choose plants according to when they bloom for example in Spring, Birdfoot violet or Beach Plum; in Summer: Joe Pye and Milkweed, and in Fall Goldenrod and Asters. Planning your garden this way will ensure a dynamic display from start to finish and provide habitat throughout the season as well.

## About Save The Great South Bay

Save The Great South Bay is a local 501(c)3 non-profit that advocates for and implements real solutions that help restore and protect the bay, and with that, strengthen our South Shore communities. Our volunteer-driven activities include the Creek Defender Program, Bay Friendly Yards, and the Great South Bay Oyster Project. To learn more, visit [www.savethegreatsouthbay.org](http://www.savethegreatsouthbay.org) and follow us on social media.

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