



Matching Native Plants to Favorite Butterflies and Moths

Butterflies and moths visit flowers of almost any species of plant in search of nectar throughout the growing season, but they look for certain species of plants when it's time to lay their eggs. Some species of butterflies and moths lay their eggs on a variety of plant species, while others depend on just one family of plants or even a single species to provide food for their caterpillars once the eggs hatch. Female butterflies may fly miles in search of these larval host plants, so you can help them by planting some of these along with plants that provide nectar. Caterpillars are baby moths and butterflies. Don't use insecticides!

The following tables list some of our native butterflies and moths along with their larval host plants that are also native in Michigan.

Swallowtails	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Giant swallowtail	northern prickly-ash (<i>Zanthoxylum americanum</i>), hop tree (<i>Ptelea trifoliata</i>)
Zebra swallowtail	pawpaw (<i>Asimina triloba</i>)
Black swallowtail	parsley family (Apiaceae), e.g., golden Alexander (<i>Zizia aurea</i>), purplestem angelica (<i>Angelica atropurpurea</i>), black snakeroot (<i>Sanicula odorata</i>), rattlesnake master (<i>Eryngium yuccifolium</i>)

Swallowtails	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Eastern tiger swallowtail	tuliptree (<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>), cherries & plums (<i>Prunus</i> spp.), ashes (<i>Fraxinus</i> spp.)
Spicebush swallowtail	spicebush (<i>Lindera benzoin</i>), sassafras (<i>Sassafras albidum</i>)

Hairstreaks & Blues	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Banded hairstreak	oaks (<i>Quercus</i> spp.), hickories (<i>Carya</i> spp.), black walnut (<i>Juglans nigra</i>), butternut (<i>Juglans cinerea</i>)
Gray hairstreak	tick-trefoils (<i>Desmodium</i> spp.), bush-clovers (<i>Lespedeza capitata</i> , <i>L. hirta</i>), swamp mallow (<i>Hibiscus moscheutos</i>)
Henry's elfin	redbud (<i>Cercis canadensis</i>), Michigan holly (<i>Ilex verticillata</i>), blueberries (<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.)
Eastern tailed blue	tick-trefoils (<i>Desmodium</i> spp.), bush-clovers (<i>Lespedeza capitata</i> , <i>L. hirta</i>),
Spring azure/summer azure	dogwoods (<i>Swida</i> spp.*, <i>Benthamidia florida</i>), cherries & plums (<i>Prunus</i> spp.), viburnums (<i>Viburnum</i> spp.), blueberries (<i>Vaccinium</i> spp.), meadowsweet (<i>Spiraea</i> spp.), New Jersey tea (<i>Ceanothus americanus</i>), wing stem (<i>Verbesina alternifolia</i>)

Checkerspots, Crescent, & Commas	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Baltimore checkerspot	white turtlehead (<i>Chelone glabra</i>), false foxglove (<i>Agalinis</i> spp.), viburnums (<i>Viburnum</i> spp.)
Silvery checkerspot	false sunflower (<i>Heliopsis helianthoides</i>), sunflowers (<i>Helianthus</i> spp.), black-eyed Susans (<i>Rudbeckia</i> spp.), wing stem (<i>Verbesina alternifolia</i>), coneflowers (<i>Echinacea</i> spp.)
Pearl crescent	asters (<i>Symphotrichum</i> spp.)
Question mark	hackberry (<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>), elms (<i>Ulmus</i> spp.), nettle (<i>Urtica dioica</i>), false nettle (<i>B. cylindrica</i>)
Eastern comma	nettle (<i>Urtica dioica</i>), elms (<i>Ulmus</i> spp.)

*Many woody dogwood species were moved from *Cornus* to *Swida*

Fritillaries	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Great spangled fritillary	violets (<i>Viola</i> spp.)
Meadow fritillary	violets (<i>Viola</i> spp.)

Brushfoot Butterflies	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Mourning cloak	willows (<i>Salix</i> spp.), elms (<i>Ulmus</i> spp.), aspens (<i>Populus</i> spp.), birches (<i>Betula</i> spp.), hackberry tree (<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>)
American lady	pussytoes (<i>Antennaria</i> spp.), pearly everlasting (<i>Anaphalis margaritacea</i>), fragrant cudweed (<i>Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium</i>)
Painted lady	thistles (<i>Cirsium</i> spp.), mallows, asters, legumes, and many others
Red admiral	stinging nettle (<i>Urtica dioica</i>), false nettle (<i>Boehmeria cylindrica</i>)
Common buckeye	plantains (<i>Plantago</i> spp.), figworts (<i>Scrophularia</i> spp.), vervains (<i>Verbena</i> spp.), blue toadflax (<i>Nuttallanthus canadensis</i>)
Red-spotted purple	cherries (<i>Prunus</i> spp.), willows (<i>Salix</i> spp.), aspens (<i>Populus</i> spp.), serviceberries (<i>Amelanchier</i> spp.), birches (<i>Betula</i> spp.), hawthorns (<i>Crataegus</i> spp.), American crabapple (<i>Malus coronaria</i>)
Monarch	milkweeds (<i>Asclepias</i> spp.)
Viceroy	willows (<i>Salix</i> spp.), aspens and cottonwoods (<i>Populus</i> spp.)

Satyrs	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Appalachian brown	sedges (<i>Carex</i> spp.)
Little wood satyr	bluegrasses (<i>Poa</i> spp.), bottlebrush grass (<i>Elymus hystrix</i>)
Common wood nymph	purpletop grass (<i>Tridens flavus</i>), poverty grass (<i>Danthonia spicata</i>), big bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>), little bluestem (<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>)

Skippers	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Silver-spotted skipper	honey locust (<i>Gleditsia triacanthos</i>), tick-trefoils (<i>Desmodium</i> spp.), hog-peanut (<i>Amphicarpa bracteata</i>), and other legumes
Columbine duskywing	wild columbine (<i>Aquilegia canadensis</i>)
Wild indigo duskywing	indigos (<i>Baptisia</i> spp.), lupine (<i>Lupinus perennis</i>)
Delaware skipper	big bluestem (<i>Andropogon gerardii</i>), switchgrass (<i>Panicum virgatum</i>)

Moths	Larval Host Plants in Michigan
Hummingbird clearwing moth	viburnums (<i>Viburnum</i> spp.), hawthorns (<i>Crataegus</i> spp.), cherries and plums (<i>Prunus</i> spp.)
Snowberry clearwing moth	honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera</i> spp.), snowberry (<i>Symphoricarpos albus</i>), dogbanes (<i>Apocynum</i> spp.)
Luna moth	hickories (<i>Carya</i> spp.), walnuts (<i>Juglans nigra</i> and <i>J. cinerea</i>), sumacs (<i>Rhus</i> spp.)

These tables were adapted and expanded from the *Butterfly Larval Host Plant List* from the Penn State Extension's Master Gardener Program. Photos by Elizabeth Seagull.

Additional references:

Butterflies of North America by Jim P. Brock & Kenn Kaufman, Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Co.; 1st edition (2003)

Butterfly Plants by Bill Schneider, Wildtype Native Plant Nursery.
https://www.wildtypeplants.com/files/ugd/8a6639_10f3bf1c2c8649f1a793c102cfd253e9.pdf

Michigan Butterflies & Skippers: A Field Guide and Reference by Mogens C. Nielson, Publisher: Michigan State University Extension; 1st edition (1999)

Luna Moth, Actias (=Tropaea) luna (Linnaeus) (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Saturniidae: Saturniinae) by Donald W. Hall, Publisher: University of Florida Extension Publication #EENY-411, January 12, 2023.

Michigan Flora website maintained by the University of Michigan Herbarium.
<https://www.michiganflora.net/> (accessed 2/8/2026)

Sphingidae of the United States: Biology • Ecology • Distribution by Teá Montagna, Dan Montagna

*Many woody dogwood species were moved from *Cornus* to *Swida*