

Planting for Lepidoptera

The Moths and Butterflies of NZ Trust (MBNZT) is happy to report that formalised pollinator planting is now prevalent across the country's public spaces.

Pollination is how plants reproduce. It's the simple but essential process of transferring pollen from the male part of a flower to the female part, so the plant can make seeds and fruit. Some trees and grasses are pollinated by the wind, but our most well-known pollinators are insects, birds and bats.

We have noticed that Councils have been encouraging residents to plant for pollinators while incorporating the practice into their own work across parks, reserves and streetscapes. The practice results in attractive and biodiverse areas benefiting the public. It also benefits moths and butterflies as well as other animal species, many of which have populations in decline.

Bees work efficiently with many species having pollen baskets or 'scopae' to actively collect pollen. Butterflies reach down into flowers looking for nectar and collect pollen "by accident" which is then transferred to the next flower they visit. Moths are attracted at night by pale or luminous flowers. In a similar vein, birds are after nectar and transfer pollen much the same way as butterflies do.

While the work of the Moths and Butterflies of New Zealand Trust focuses on our butterflies and moths, we are of course interested in other pollinators as well. As far as plantings go, broadly speaking we are seeing:

- Sustainable, low maintenance planting as refuges and pollinator pathways
- Large "patches" of planting of the same species – making foraging easier for pollinators while creating stronger visual impact
- Consideration given to a year-round supply of food for our pollinators
- Reliable native species such as *Muehlenbeckia*, kanuka, manuka *Olearia* and Pohutukawa as the backbones for planting
- Seasonal plantings of nectar species as features and ornamental plantings
- Plantings at different levels – groundcover to trees – to appeal to different species
- Small branches, leaves etc left to provide nesting sites (and enrich the soil)
- Native flora showcased wherever possible

Brian Patrick, our Biodiversity Advisor, has published a [simple guide](#) to creating habitat for butterflies and moths. In the past there has not been much consideration given to the topic of planting for butterflies and moths but this is an article on [nectar sources](#) for butterflies and moths.

This list is of [nectar plants](#) which are used by butterflies and moths as host plants and nectar sources.

Here is also a list of [native plants](#) which are used by butterflies and moths.

As far as seed purchased from commercial suppliers, original varieties of plants usually provide more nectar than recent hybrids. Flowers need to be simple with an open face and a single row of petals so that the nectary is exposed.

The MBNZT canvassed our membership and social media followers as to what our butterflies prefer in their backyards. We received over 100 responses – and these plants proved popular in all parts of the country.

Annuals:

- Cosmos (*Cosmos bipinnatus*)
- Dahlias
- Mexican marigold (*Tagetes speciosa* 'Goldfinger')
- Zinnias (*Zinnia elegans* and *Z. angustifolia*)

Shrubs/Trees

- Mexican Marigold (*Tagetes lemmonii*)
- Hebe spp. (now reclassified as *Veronica* spp.)
- Houhere / lacebark (*Hoheria* spp.)
- Kowhai
- Pohutukawa

We have no doubt that pollinator planting will continue to be a pillar of conservation strategy across the motu.

This document is a work in progress and we always welcome new ideas. Feel free to email trust@nzbutterflies.org.nz if you have pollinator projects or information of interest which we could share with our members.