

**Butterflies-** By Stan Southwick



One of our readers recently requested an article about attracting butterflies and humming birds. These little flying critters are very beautiful and will bring another dimension to your landscape. I have had humming birds nest in my yard and the monarch butterflies love my Texas Mountain Laurel. It is quite fascinating and educational to watch as a nest is built, eggs laid, new birds hatch, mature and eventually fly on their own. I still think it is one of the most amazing transformation to watch a caterpillar turn into a beautiful butterfly.

To get butterflies to come into your yard you will want to do two things. One is to provide nectar producing plants and the other is to provide host plants. Host plants are where the butterfly lays its eggs, the caterpillar matures, forms the cocoon and turns into a butterfly again. These plants are very specific to the species of butterfly. Remember that the host plants are the food source for the caterpillar and the plant will sustain some damage. It is best to intermix nectar producing plants with the host plants. Mixing the plants will also help to provide a little shelter and wind protection.

You can see a few working butterfly gardens around the Las Vegas Valley. The Henderson Hospital at Galleria & US 95 and Charlie Frias Park at Decatur and Tropicana both have butterfly gardens. The Springs Preserve has an enclosed garden that is definitely worth the admission fee.

A list of plants and design ideas can be found with a simple web search. Here are a few sites.  
[www.springspreserve.org/attractions/butterfly\\_habitat.html](http://www.springspreserve.org/attractions/butterfly_habitat.html)  
[www.springspreserve.org/assets/pdf/gardens\\_butterfly\\_plants.pdf](http://www.springspreserve.org/assets/pdf/gardens_butterfly_plants.pdf)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=eR8zpEvJbyo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eR8zpEvJbyo)

“The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the eyes of others only a green thing that stands in the way. Some see nature all ridicule and deformity... and some scarce see nature at all. But to the eyes of the man of imagination, nature is imagination itself.”  
— William Blake

**Favorite Flora:**

**Echinocactus polycephalus- Cottontop Cactus-** By Jon Marenfeld



If you're someone who likes a tough and unique plant and likes native cacti then the Cottontop cactus is for you. It gets its name from the woolly hairs that develop on the crown and around the seed pods. *Echinocactus polycephalus* is a true Mojave Desert native that also occurs in the Sonoran Desert regions of southern California and northern Sonora, Mexico. They grow in some of the most extreme arid environments in the

American Southwest such as Death Valley National Park and the Mojave National Preserve of southern California. Cottontop Cactus grows in spreading clumps with 20-40 heads being fairly common. Each stem grows to about 12 inches in diameter and up to 15 inches tall. It has spines that turn red when they get wet from rain. They typically bloom during the hottest part of the year producing a summertime treat of yellow flowers with woolly hairs on its crown and around the seed pods. Fun facts: Birds and small mammals use the fluff for nesting materials and the Panamint Indians of California ate the seeds of the fruit. The flesh of these cacti was made into a kind of candy by the Tohono O'odham Indians. The thorny rind was cut away, the remainder was left to drain, the pulp was then cut into pieces and boiled in syrup made from the fruit of the Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*).

**Photo of the Month**



Fiery Sunset  
Valley of Fire, NV  
Caryl Davies

Because the Cottontop Cactus is a Mojave Desert native it is easy to grow and maintain. It can handle full sun and if you're in a cooler part of the Las Vegas Valley plant it near a south facing wall so that the wall can reflect additional warmth during the cooler winter months. Because cacti are uniquely adapted to our harsh climate it's important not to over water them which can rot the roots and kill the plant. Once established season rainfall should be sufficient but an occasional infrequent deep watering during especially hot and dry periods will help the cactus weather tougher conditions. Use the *Echinocactus polycephalus* as an accent in a xeriscape garden or planter and pair it with other Mojave Desert natives and small boulders for a nearly maintenance-free drought-tolerant garden. Check the Regional Plant List by the Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition for other native plants.