

The Beginner's UK Butterfly Spotting Guide



12 Common UK Butterflies Every Nature Lover Should Know

You don't need to be a wildlife expert to enjoy butterflies. Learning to recognise a few familiar species is often the first step towards a deeper connection with nature.

- Easy to spot in gardens, parks and green spaces
- Summer is one of the best times to see butterflies
- Recording sightings can help conservation efforts



Large White Butterfly (*Pieris brassicae*)

Large White (*Pieris brassicae*)

Where: Gardens, allotments, farmland

Nectar: Buddleia, thistles, dandelions

Food plants: Cabbages, kale, nasturtiums

Tip: The largest of the white butterflies. Look for bold black wing tips and a strong, direct flight.



Small White Butterfly (*Pieris rapae*)

Small White (*Pieris rapae*)

Where: Gardens, parks, allotments

Nectar: Buddleia, clover, dandelions

Food plants: Cabbages, kale, nasturtiums

Tip: Smaller and daintier than the Large White, with less black on its wings and a lighter, fluttering flight.



Meadow Brown Butterfly (*Maniola jurtina*) at TCV Skelton Grange Environment Centre, Leeds.

Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*)

Where: Meadows, grasslands, hedgerows

Nectar: Bramble, knapweed, thistles

Food plants: Various grasses

Tip: One of the UK's most common butterflies. Look for the single white eyespot.



Gatekeeper Butterfly (*Pyronia tithonus*)

Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*)

Where: Hedgerows, field edges, lanes

Nectar: Bramble, marjoram, ragwort

Food plants: Fine grasses

Tip: Smaller than Meadow Brown with orange patches and double white pupils



Red Admiral Butterfly (Vanessa atalanta)

Red Admiral (Vanessa atalanta)

Where: Gardens, parks, woodland edges

Nectar: Buddleia, ivy flowers, ripe fruit

Food plants: Stinging nettles

Tip: Easy to recognise by its bold red stripes



Peacock Butterfly (Aglais io) at TCV Skelton Grange Environment Centre, Leeds

Peacock (Aglais io)

Where: Gardens, parks, woodland rides

Nectar: Buddleia, thistles, knapweed

Food plants: Stinging nettles

Tip: Look for the large eye spots on each wing



Painted Lady Butterfly (Vanessa cardui)

Painted Lady (Vanessa cardui)

Where: Gardens, meadows, coastal grasslands

Nectar: Thistles, buddleia, scabious, lilac

Food plants: Thistles, mallows, nettles

Tip: A remarkable migrant butterfly that travels thousands of miles



Comma Butterfly (Polygonia c-album)

Comma (Polygonia c-album)

Where: Gardens, hedgerows, woodland edges

Nectar: Bramble, ivy flowers, overripe fruit

Food plants: Hops, nettles

Tip: Ragged wing edges make it look like a dead leaf

Why butterflies matter

Butterflies are more than just beautiful insects. They help pollinate flowers and are important indicators of healthy habitats. The more butterflies we see, the more likely it is that nature is thriving too.



Beginner tip

Don't worry about learning all 12 species at once. Start with just three or four and build your confidence from there.

"No one will protect what they do not care about, and no one will care about what they have never experienced."



Sir David Attenborough, TCV Vice President



Orange-tip Butterfly (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

Orange-tip (*Anthocharis cardamines*)

Where: Meadows, grassy verges, woodland edges

Nectar: Cuckooflower, garlic mustard

Food plants: Garlic mustard, cuckooflower

Tip: Males have bright orange wing tips



Brimstone Butterfly (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)

Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*)

Where: Hedgerows, woodland edges, gardens

Nectar: Primrose, teasel, knapweed

Food plants: Alder buckthorn, purging buckthorn

Tip: The bright yellow males seem to glow in sunshine



Speckled Wood Butterfly (*Pararge aegeria*)

Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)

Where: Woodland paths, shaded parks

Nectar: Bramble flowers, honeydew, tree sap

Food plants: Woodland grasses

Tip: One of the few butterflies that prefers shade



Small Tortoiseshell Butterfly (*Aglais urticae*) on Greater Knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*) at TCV Skelton Grange Environment Centre, Leeds.

Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*)

Where: Gardens, parks, meadows

Nectar: Buddleia, thistles, knapweed

Food plants: Stinging nettles

Tip: Orange wings with blue spots along the edges

5 easy ways to help butterflies

- Plant nectar-rich flowers
- Let some grass grow longer
- Leave a small patch of nettles
- Avoid pesticide use
- Join in with TCV's practical conservation activities!

www.tcv.org.uk



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