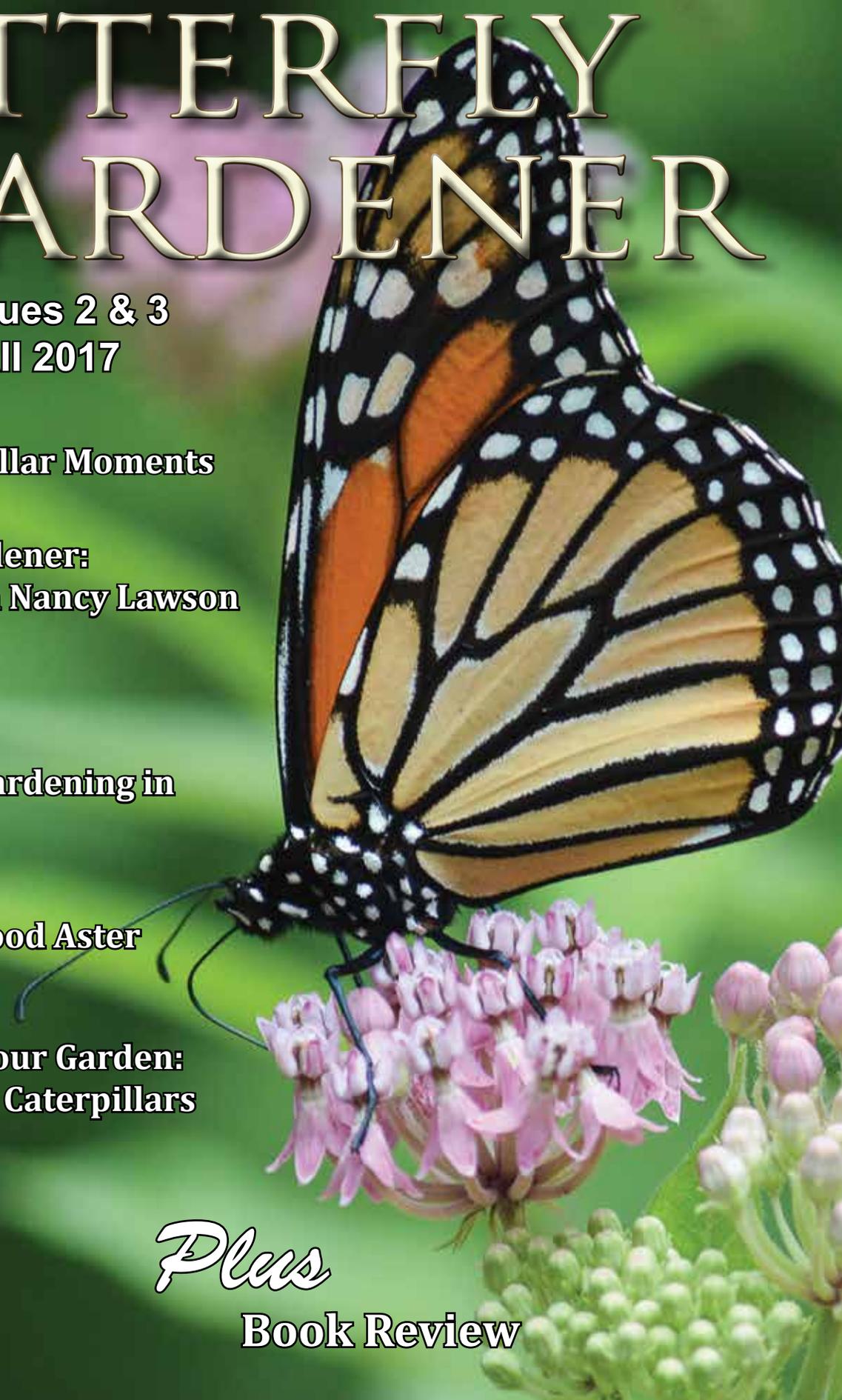


# BUTTERFLY GARDENER

A monarch butterfly with orange, black, and white wings is perched on a pink flower. The butterfly's wings are spread, showing the characteristic black veins and white spots. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a garden setting.

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*Plus*

**Book Review**

# THE HUMANE GARDENER: AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY LAWSON

BY MARY ANNE BORGE  
PHOTOS BY NANCY LAWSON

In response to questions posed by Mary Anne Borge for *Butterfly Gardener*, Nancy Lawson, author of *The Humane Gardener*, guides us through the steps we can take to become gardeners who make our property welcoming to wildlife and neighbors, a philosophy that can enhance our butterfly gardening. In the interview below, Nancy gives us a taste of what it's like to be a humane gardener.

## **What does it mean to be a humane gardener?**

A humane gardener challenges herself to see the world through the eyes (and ears and noses and antennae) of other species, from the easy-to-love butterflies and birds to the more misunderstood moles and beetles and wasps and groundhogs. She appreciates all the creatures just trying to make a life outside her door, rather than applying compassion selectively to some species and not others. Sometimes this means taking the time to learn the diverse approaches animals take to feeding, breeding, sheltering, and raising young.



**EASTERN TIGER SWALLOWTAILS ON JOE PYE WEED**

## **What did you have to change in your own gardening practices to become a humane gardener?**

I never used fertilizers or pesticides here, but my cultural practices were otherwise fairly conventional – in that I didn't take the time to learn who was living among us before assuming they didn't belong. A few years before gardeners began clamoring for milkweed at the nurseries and plant sales, it was sprouting on its own in our front yard. It looked like an interloper to me, so I asked my husband to chop it down as he walked around with his power trimmer.

I also kind of freaked out every time I saw an insect I didn't recognize. I remember spraying water underneath some leaves because I saw little yellow blobs and thought they were aphids. Only later did I realize they were ladybug eggs. A few experiences like that taught me to be more thoughtful. We have so much ladybug habitat here that as soon as the aphids appear, the ladies are all over them.

## **What are your biggest challenges as a humane gardener?**

Once I realized how much life was under the fallen leaves and logs, in the rotting stumps and soil, and even in my plant stalks, I was reluctant to disturb anything! This may create an issue if you're trying to keep your front yard acceptable to the neighbors. Our community is of the live-and-let-live



**FALL ASTERS**

mindset, but I don't want to merely be tolerated for my wildlife-gardening ways. I want to be such a good ambassador for plants and animals that my neighbors will feel inspired to help them, too.

We've done a few things to make both the wildlife and neighbors happy: Habitat signs explain why we garden this way. Birdbaths and a birdhouse are functional ornaments, showing people our efforts are intentional. This year in a visible spot near the road, we added more paths and defined spaces, lining them with logs and rows of Purple Lovegrass, Butterfly Milkweed, St. Johnswort, Smooth Aster and Flaxleaf Whitetop Aster, also known as stiff aster. The effect was almost instantaneous:

neighbors actually stopped in their tracks to point admiringly at areas of the garden that had previously been indiscernible to their eyes. And we didn't have to disturb very much to effect this change.



**NORTHERN PEARLY-EYE**

### **How have your gardening practices effected the butterflies you see on your property?**

When we first moved to our home in 2000, we had virtually no butterflies. I don't think I even knew it was possible to have butterflies in the home landscape! In the early years, we saw Eastern Tiger Swallowtails visit Clavel de Muerto, also known as Mexican sunflower, which I had grown from seed. For a while, I attributed this only to the presence of the flowers, not understanding that our property edges were filled with their host plants, especially Tuliptrees.

When we began to invest much more time in planting natives than in growing annuals, I noticed the tiger swallowtails were now nectaring on Eastern Purple Coneflower, Joe Pye weed, New York Ironweed, and other perennials. And then one spring I found a Black Swallowtail chrysalis in the grasses and a Mourning Cloak caterpillar crawling along some leaves by our patio—two revelatory experiences that opened my eyes to the need to attend to habitat elements far beyond just flowers.

As native plants spread on their own and leaves and logs lay undisturbed for the first time, the butterflies multiplied. In addition to the tiger swallowtails, we have almost 30 other butterfly species. Most of these butterflies are not uncommon in my county, but it's unusual to see them all in one garden.

### **Are there any other changes in the wildlife you see since you altered your gardening practices?**

Many of our fellow inhabitants are ones you don't typically see in gardens. We've been graced by the presence of indigo buntings, orioles, scarlet tanagers, barred owls, and hawks. Hummingbirds fly in front of our faces quite frequently. We've found salamanders in the leaves, ebony jewelwing damselflies near our patio, several species of dragonflies in our meadow, and abundant hummingbird moths. Toads and wood frogs keep me company as I garden, and we also have green frogs, pickerel frogs, and Eastern box turtles. The number and diversity of bees, wasps and flies is astonishing. There is always a party in the Thoroughwort, also known as boneset, and Mountainmint. Every year there is more and more life.

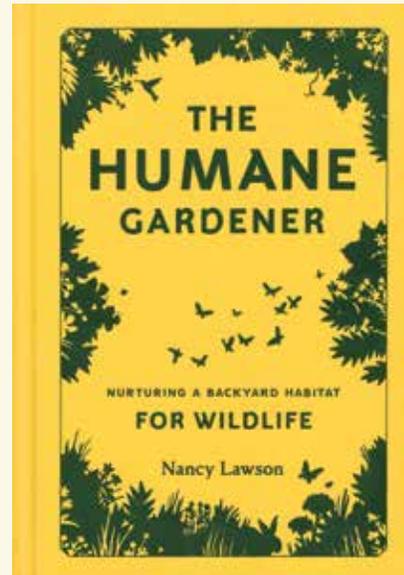
## Is there anything else you would like to share with other gardeners?

When thinking about how to support whole life cycles in your yard, it's often more about what you *don't* do than what you do. Gardening and landscaping experts tend to talk a lot about "winter interest" in the form of plant shape, colors and textures, but for me the interest comes in seeing the animals who visit. What could be more fascinating and joyous than the squirrel who bends down a leftover Wild Bergamot stalk in a snowstorm to eat the seeds or the woodpecker who comes to the stumps every evening in the summer for a little beetle-filled happy hour? These animals are better gardeners than we'll ever be, planting seeds and providing a natural balance that help us all grow and thrive.

Nancy Lawson is the author of *The Humane Gardener: Nurturing a Backyard Habitat for Wildlife* and a columnist for *All Animals* magazine. A frequent speaker on garden ecology, she founded Humane Gardener, an outreach initiative dedicated to animal-friendly landscaping methods. Lawson's book and wildlife habitat have been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Oprah Magazine*, and other media outlets. She previously led the creative teams behind the award-winning magazines of The Humane Society of the United States.

### COMMON AND SCIENTIFIC PLANT NAMES FOUND IN THE HUMANE GARDENER: AN INTERVIEW WITH NANCY LAWSON

Butterfly Milkweed– *Asclepias tuberosa*  
Clavel de Muerto, also known  
as Mexican sunflower – *Tithonia  
rotundifolia*  
Eastern Purple Coneflower - *Echinacea  
purpurea*  
Flaxleaf Whitetop Aster, also known  
as stiff aster - *Ionactis linariifolius*  
Joe Pye Weed – *Eutrochium* spp.  
Mountainmint – *Pycnanthemum* spp.  
New York Ironweed - *Vernonia  
noveboracensis*  
Purple Lovegrass - *Eragrostis spectabilis*  
Scarlet Beebalm – *Monarda didyma*  
Smooth Aster - *Eucephalus glabratus*  
St. Johnswort – *Hypericum* spp.  
Thoroughwort, also known  
as boneset – *Eupatorium* spp.  
Tuliptree - *Liriodendron tulipifera*  
Wild Bergamot – *Monarda fistulosa*



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