**The Miracle of Metamorphosis** – by Suzy Hancock, Portland Nursery

*Close your eyes for a minute – it doesn’t take much to remember as a child the fun of chasing butterflies around the yard, always just a bit out of reach. As we watch them fluttering around the garden it reminds us that summer truly belongs to the butterfly. If you are lucky enough to find a chrysalis in your garden it is a wonderful opportunity to share with your family, a true miracle. The entire world can come to a stand still for a few hours as you watch a butterfly slowly emerge – it’s wings crumpled and seeming useless at first, only to slowly straighten and form delicate wings to carry it on its way.*

*There are kits you can purchase for your kids where you send in a card and live caterpillars are sent back for them to watch this process up close. Another rewarding activity for them is to plant a butterfly garden. Many native butterflies are in danger due to loss of habitat and bringing host and nectar plants into your yard can help. A butterfly’s life stages are very different and can require different plants for each stage. Butterflies require nectar plants to attract them to your garden and host plants will allow them a place to lay eggs and provide food for their caterpillars. Some butterflies will only lay their eggs on specific plants, like the Monarch on milkweed plants. Our Butterfly Plants brochure on our web site has an extensive list of appropriate annuals, perennials, trees and shrubs listing whether they are nectar source or food source. Planting in large groups is better than just a plant here and there. Butterflies also need minerals they obtain from mud, so I like to fill a plant saucer with soil and water and place it near nectar plants for them. A female butterfly will lay her eggs on an appropriate host plant that will provide food for the young caterpillars. After they emerge they will eat and grow shedding their skins several times and sometimes changing color or shape in the process. When they are finally mature they form into a chrysalis where the magic of becoming a butterfly happens.*

*Most Pacific Northwest butterflies live their entire life cycle here. Some exceptions are the Monarch which migrates south and Painted Ladies which come up from Mexico in the spring. Because of this you should be careful to not remove all dead plant material from your butterfly garden without carefully checking for overwintering eggs. Leaf litter and overwintering plants are an important part of their habitat. It is also important to remember that pesticides will affect wanted caterpillars as well as unwanted ones. Take the time to identify that caterpillar before you remove it from your garden. Remember – a host plant is meant to be eaten!*

*So if you want to slow the world down a bit and experience a sense of magic again – plant a butterfly garden!*