

# Golf Courses Can Help Butterflies Take Flight

BY RON DODSON

**Editor's Note:** This column will appear bimonthly in *Golfdom*. Dodson, the CEO of Audubon International, can be reached at [rdodson@auduboninternational.org](mailto:rdodson@auduboninternational.org).



**T**here are more than 700 species of butterflies in North America, but many of them are declining in substantial numbers. Butterflies are in worse shape than birds in regard to the number of species in decline. Golf courses can play an important role in the conservation of these important insects, and their preservation can be a part of a golf course beautification program.

Creating a butterfly refuge on the golf course is actually a fairly simple and rewarding project that can literally bring landscaped areas around the course to life. Plants that attract butterflies can be added to annual beds, perennial borders, containers, hanging baskets and general landscaping. In addition, nectar-producing flowers for

adult butterflies and host plants for caterpillars can be planted in special butterfly gardens near tee boxes, around the clubhouse and in other locations around the golf course.

All butterflies go through dramatic changes before becoming the butterflies that we all recognize. Butterflies start out as eggs, most often laid on the underside of a leaf or branch. Caterpillars are born with a healthy appetite and often eat their shells as their first meal.

The plants on which the butterfly eggs are deposited, and on which they feed, are called host plants. The Monarch Butterfly, for example, only feeds on milkweed. Milkweed contains chemical compounds known as cardiac glycosides, which make the caterpillar unpleasant-tasting to predators, therefore helping ensure a higher survival rate.

If you would like to become part of the movement to help conserve and restore the populations of butterflies, there are some basic steps that need to be taken:

► **Choose a sunny, sheltered location to get started.** Like other insects, butterflies are cold-blooded. They rely on the sun to raise their body temperatures and their metabolisms so they can fly. That is why you often see butterflies in sunny meadows or basking on rocks or roads with their wings perpendicular to the sun for

optimal solar absorption.

► **Provide abundant nectar sources.** Provide plants that are highly visible and easily accessible. Bright-colored flowers with numerous flower heads and large petals to land on are most attractive.

► **Include host plants for caterpillars.** This will require a bit of investigation on your part to determine what butterflies occur in your region and what specific host plant requirements these butterflies need.

► **Avoid pesticide use around butterfly gardens.** Since butterflies are insects, they are susceptible to pesticide exposure.

► **Add a few finishing touches.** In addition to the host and nectar plants, a small patch of mud or wet sand will provide needed water and salts for the butterflies. Add a few flat rocks near the edge of the garden for resting.

There are many excellent books about butterfly conservation available that can help you to select the right plants for your region, as well as provide more information about butterflies.

To get you started, some good annual plants for butterfly gardens include: Cosmos, Calendula, Impatiens, Snapdragon, Sunflower and Zinnia. A short list of good perennial plants include: Anemone, Columbine, Red Milkweed, Aster, Wild Indigo, Coreopsis, Purple Cone Flower, Joe Pye Weed, Ox Eye Sunflower, Blue Flag Iris, Turks Cap Lilly and Spiderwort.

There are also shrubs, trees and vines that can be beneficial in a butterfly garden, including Leadplant, Carolina Allspice, Flowering Dogwood, Button Sage, Northern Spicebush, Sassafras and Trumpet Vine.

Host plants are important for butterflies and caterpillars, and include Black-eyed Susans, Butterfly Weed, Clovers, Hibiscus, Indian Paint Brush, Milkweed, Mustards and Violets.

For more information about butterflies and butterfly conservation, you can visit <http://www.xerces.org>.

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