

Flower Gardens Attract Butterflies, and Butterflies Attract Birds

By Dr. Lois Berg Stack
Ornamental Horticulture Specialist
University of Maine Cooperative Extension

If you've worked to encourage wildlife on the golf course, then you've come to appreciate the importance of diversity—diversity of plantings, design, and approaches to management. Perhaps you've enrolled in the Audubon program, planted shrubs that produce fruit for birds throughout the year, hung up bird feeders, and erected bird houses. And you may have posted "no trespassing" signs in areas which threatened birds nest, altered waterways to encourage shoreline feeders, and left snags in wild areas as nesting sites.

There's another thing you can do to attract birds: plant a butterfly garden. Butterflies are beautiful to watch, and they provide excellent food for birds. Since you will plant flower gardens around the course next summer anyway, why not plant flowers that are especially attractive to butterflies? Butterfly gardens have become very popular in the past few years. And even the most serious golfers enjoy pausing for a moment to see a monarch or swallowtail flit by or to watch a bird stalk a caterpillar.

Butterflies have few needs: water, sunlight, protection from wind, and food. Trees and shrubs provide significant sources of food for birds (see "Shrubs for the Golf Course: Beauty and Function for Us, Food and Shelter for Birds" in the September/October 1996 issue of THE GRASS ROOTS), but butterflies prefer herbaceous plants because of their more continuous production of flowers. Free-flowering annuals are excellent butterfly attractants because they produce nectar throughout the summer. Here are fifteen great annuals that do the following:

1. They are good food sources for butterflies. Some of them, like parsley, provide excellent leaf tissue for caterpillars (after all, if there weren't caterpillars, there wouldn't be butterflies). Most of these annuals have flat or open flowers, so that the butter-

flies can access the nectaries with their short mouthparts. These plants also flower most of the summer, providing nectar for butterflies over a period of many weeks.

2. These plants are uniform, predictable, relatively disease-free, and easy to manage. Most of them require very little deadheading (removal of old flowers) in order to produce more flowers. They all perform best in the conditions where you are most likely to plant annuals on the golf course—full sun, and well-drained fertile soil with good water-holding capacity.

3. These annuals are high-quality landscape plants that will put on a good show of color from mid-June through frost.

4. Nearly all of these annuals are readily available in the marketplace. Of course for large plantings you should work with a greenhouse grower to custom-grow for your needs. But even for a last-minute planting next June, you should be able to find many of these plants through a local grower.

Fifteen Annuals for Butterfly Gardens

"Bloodflower" (*Asclepias curassavica*) is an outstanding and underused annual flower. In past years it was not commonly found in gardens or in garden centers, but more growers produce it now because of the popularity of butterfly gardens. Bloodflower is closely related to common milkweed, so it has milky sap, strong straight stems and flat-topped clusters of small flowers. In fall, it produces the familiar bumpy pods which split open to expose wispy seeds for the wind to disperse. The wild type of bloodflower, which reaches 30" in height, produces mid-to-late summer orange-red flowers, but some gold-colored cultivars like 'Silky Gold' have recently been introduced. I've tried 'Silky Gold' as a cut flower, and

found it to be reliable, uniform, high-yielding and a great host for monarch caterpillars. Actually, I've cheated a bit by including this plant on the list. It does attract great numbers of monarchs, but they won't attract birds. You may be aware that monarchs are distasteful to birds because of the glycosides they accumulate in their bodies by feeding on members of the milkweed genus. Still, monarchs are such beautiful insects that it's worth including this plant in any garden.

"Butterflybush" (*Buddleia x davidii*) is actually a woody plant that reaches a height and width of 3 - 4' each summer. In all but the most protected sites in Wisconsin, it dies back to the ground in fall, and sends forth new shoots each year, thereby functioning much like an herbaceous perennial. In open, cold locations and in northern Wisconsin, it dies in the winter and should be treated as an annual, grown from cuttings. Even where it

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functions as an annual, it is fairly cost-effective because of the garden space it fills. Butterflybush flowers at the end of the season, producing slender 4 - 8" long clusters of small lilac-like flowers. The color range includes white and a wide range of violets from pale lilac to intense purple. Flower scent is very sweet, and the fragrance wafts through the air on still evenings (plant a few near the clubhouse). Many butterflies feed on butterflybush, and hummingbirds constantly hover over it in late summer.

"Pink Cosmos" (*Cosmos bipinnatus*) is an old-fashioned favorite that can be direct-seeded or transplanted as a seedling. The bushy plants have very fine-textured, fern-like foliage and 3" pink, lavender or white daisy-like flowers. Pink cosmos is a great plant for the background of a border, but it does perform better when deadheaded periodically throughout the summer. The 4-5' height of most cultivars would limit their use on the golf course, but there are a few lower growing types available. For example, 'Sonata' cosmos reaches a height of just 20".

"Annual Blanketflower" (*Gaillardia pulchella*) is an interesting annual. It is a daisy, but its flowers are tubular instead of flat, and they are arranged so that the flower heads form 2" globes of red, yellow, or red-and-yellow. Most perennial gardeners are familiar with the perennial species of blanketflower, but this annual type was not grown much until 1991, when the cultivar 'Red Plume' received an All-America Selections (AAS) award. This cultivar is excellent in a hot summer, forming a loose 12" mound of foliage, and producing an abundance of red flowers on wiry 24" stems. Blanketflower adds an element of movement to the garden as the flowers sway in the breeze, and they make great cut flowers. Occasional deadheading helps keep the plants in color. Annual blanketflower performs best in perfectly drained soil, and it tolerates droughty summer conditions well. Butterflies and hummingbirds hover over blanketflowers all summer.

"Globe Amaranth" (*Gomphrena globosa* and *Gomphrena haageana*) is a popular dried flower, valued for its clover-like flower clusters that are

available in magenta, pink, red and orange. There are white types, but they are a little muddy in color; there are better white flowers for the annual flower garden. Globe amaranth is upright and bushy, reaching a height of 24" with minimal maintenance. It tolerates great drought during the summer. If given space it branches well and produces masses of flowers without deadheading.

Most cultivars of "Lavender" (*Lavandula angustifolia*) are tender perennials, but one cultivar called 'Lady' can be grown as an annual. 'Lady' lavender won a much-deserved AAS award in 1994. It is small, reaching a height of 10 - 12", and it is not reliably hardy as a perennial. Still, as an annual it is delightful. It produces its flowers in August, at a time when there are not many blue-lavender flowers in the garden. During the heat of August, blue is a welcome cool color. The fragrance of the flowers is pleasant not only to us, but to many species of butterflies as well. Even when the plant is not in flower, its narrow gray-green foliage makes a high-quality edging plant for the garden.

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"Sweet Alyssum" (*Lobularia maritima*) is a popular edging plant. Pink and lavender cultivars are available, but the white ones are still the best. This fragrant little plant is a member of the mustard family, and like most of its relatives, it performs best in cool weather. That means it flowers heavily in spring and fall, but less during a hot summer. Here in Maine, especially along the coast, it flowers relentlessly from late May through mid-October. In hot summers of the upper Midwest, it generally stops flowering in summer, or at least it slows down. In such locations it can be sheared back to 2-3" in height in midsummer, after the first flush of flowering is past, to encourage production of a second crop of flowers in fall. Sweet alyssum is an important source of nectar in early spring and late fall, when many other plants produce few flowers.

"Flowering Tobacco" (*Nicotiana glauca*) has been much improved by plant breeders. Years ago, it was a leggy plant that needed deadheading to perform well throughout the summer. Newer types flower much more freely, are more compact (14-18"), and include an expanded color range of reds, pinks, white and pale green. Many are fragrant. Newer types tolerate heat and a fair amount of drought, but all perform better in a slightly more protected spot, and most tolerate partial shade. This plant is frequently visited by butterflies and hummingbirds. If only birds would eat the Colorado potato beetles that bother this plant!

"Parsley" (*Petroselinum crispum*) is primarily known as a cooking herb, but it also makes an excellent edging plant in an annual garden. It is a biennial, so it doesn't produce flowers until its second year. Of course we grow it as an annual, for its high-quality edible foliage. Swallowtail butterflies' caterpillars feed voraciously on parsley leaves. Since the plants produce abundant foliage, this feeding rarely causes significant cosmetic damage to the plant. As a crisp edging for a garden, parsley is a solid performer.

"Petunia" (*Petunia x hybrida*) is a plant that people either love or hate. It requires fairly high levels of fertilizer, it must be deadheaded frequently, and it usually needs to be cut back once or twice during the season to prevent leggy growth. But when managed well, petunia produces unequaled

color in the garden. It has one of the widest color ranges of all annuals: reds, white, blues, purples, pinks, yellow and many bicolors. If you are choosing among the standard petunias, select a multiflora type over a grandiflora. Multifloras produce smaller flowers, but there are more of them and they recover better after rain. There are two new types of petunia on the market that are well worth a try. One type is the "milliflora," represented by 'Fantasy Pink Morn,' a 1996 AAS winner. This petunia has even smaller flowers than the multiflora types, and even more of them. It forms a neat mound about 18" across and 10" tall, and requires less deadheading than most petunias. And you would have to have been absent from the planet last year to have missed the "new" petunias that everyone is raving about: depending on the specific group, you may know them by various names like Surfinia, Wonder Falls, Supertunia or Cascadia. These are all propagated from cuttings, but there is one very similar type called 'Purple Wave,' a 1995 AAS winner, that is propagated by seed. All of these "new petunias" have a very low growth habit (3 - 5"), and very strong lateral branching habits, with plants reaching 3 - 4' diameter by the end of the season. And perhaps the best part of all is that they flower freely, remaining in full color all summer without deadheading. (No, I am not joking.) These plants are generally available in 4" pots rather than in packs, and some greenhouse growers only grow them in hanging baskets. All of the "new petunias" require full sun, well-drained soil, regular water supply and fairly high fertilizer rates. But they produce excellent color in return for this small investment. And like other petunias, they attract a wide range of insects, including

bumblebees and several species of butterflies.

"Blue Salvia" (*Salvia farinacea*) is a popular plant for the midground and background of annual gardens. It does well in hot, fairly dry locations, and also lasts long after the light frosts of early fall. One excellent cultivar is 'Victoria,' which reaches 18" in height and flowers quite freely. A newer type that is a bit more unusual is 'Strata,' an AAS winner for 1996. This cultivar produces silver calyx tubes and blue petals, giving it a pale blue appearance from a distance, and a bicolor appearance at closer viewing. It is 16" tall, very uniform and quite floriferous. All of the salvias attract many butterflies, but the blue salvias require less maintenance than the others.

"French Marigold" (*Tagetes patula*) is an old standby for annual flower gardens, and new types are introduced each year. Generally, the plants are 8 - 12" tall, with single or double flowers available in yellows, golds oranges and red. Although deadheading throughout the summer is essential to keep them in color, the results are worth the work. Few plants can equal the bright spectacle of these annuals.

"Scotch Marigolds" (*Tagetes tenuifolia*) is less well-known than French and African marigolds, but it is unique. It forms a highly branched mound of fine-leaved foliage, 16" across and 12" high. The single flowers are small (less than one inch diameter) and either yellow, gold or orange. What this plant lacks in diversity, it more than makes up for by requiring little maintenance. It is the one marigold that does not require deadheading to produce flowers all season. A soft mound of these plants lining the edge of a garden is

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attractive all season. There is one caution, however; the plants are not as uniform as the other marigolds, and you must select uniform seedlings at planting time in order to achieve a high-quality planting.

The verbenas have long been popular landscape annuals, known for their intense colors. A rather new one, *Verbena speciosa* 'Imagination,' won an AAS award in 1993. A very similar cultivar, 'Tapien Blue,' is a member of the Proven Winners series of annuals. Both are valued for their very fine-textured foliage, low spreading habit (spreading to 24" diameter by midsummer, with a height of 6"), and their intense purple flowers. Both are interesting annuals for some locations, and they attract good numbers of butterflies and other insects, but there are two cautions. First, they tend to produce an intense and prolific array of flowers that peak in color in mid-August, and then diminish in color for the rest of the season. And second, they are difficult to pull out at the end of the season; every stem seems to root vigorously.

Zinnias are beautiful annuals, but powdery mildew and fungal leaf spots can devastate the plants in a humid season. Fortunately, one species of

zinnia, the "Narrow-leaved Zinnia" (*Zinnia angustifolia*), is highly resistant to the fungal problems. It produces 1.5" yellow or white flowers all season, regardless of deadheading. The plants are upright and bushy, 18-24" tall, and very free-flowering. Like most members of the daisy family, the narrow-leaved zinnia attracts many insects including butterflies.

Putting Annuals Together in a Butterfly Garden

Generally, annual gardens look best when many plants each of just a few different types are used. For example, a garden with 12 cosmos in the middle, 30 flowering tobacco plants around them and an edging of sweet alyssum would be more effective than a garden composed of 5 each of 20 different types of annuals. In other words: keep it simple!

Here are just a few ideas for annual gardens, using the plants in the list above:

1. You could achieve a large, rather tall and imposing garden by planting several deep blue or violet buddleias in the middle, surrounded by pale pink globe amaranths, and edged with parsley. In this garden, gomphrena would flower most of the season to attract a constant supply of various butterflies. Parsley would pro-

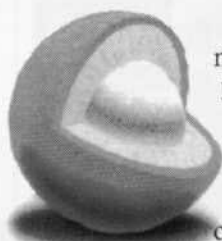
vide caterpillar food all season, and the buddleia would produce great color and attract many species of butterflies from mid-August until hard frost. As the buddleias grew, they would provide cover for birds.

2. A simple but very effective "cool color" garden could be created with a central area of 'Strata' blue salvia, surrounded by 'Lady' lavenders, with an edging of white sweet alyssum. The sweet alyssum would produce color and fragrance for golfers, and nectar for butterflies in the cooler parts of the year. The blue salvia would be effective from late June until hard frost, and the lavender would provide elegance and fragrance in August.

3. You could create a brightly colored garden that would attract a wide range of butterflies with a central area of 'Silky Gold' bloodflower interplanted with 'Red Plume' blanketflowers. Around that, plant lower growing yellow Scotch marigolds. And as an edging, try some dwarf red French marigolds.

4. On a south-facing slope, try a mass planting of one of the low-growing verbenas or one of the "new petunias." Either type of planting would be quite stunning and would require little maintenance during the summer. ♣

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