

Butterflies are Free...

But Buying Flowers Will Help You Lure Them To The Course

By Lois Berg Stack

*Ornamental Horticulture Specialist
University of Maine Cooperative Extension*

Your efforts to encourage wildlife on the golf course have no doubt helped you appreciate the importance of diversity — diversity of plantings, design and approaches to management. 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. You've posted "no trespassing" signs in areas which threatened bird's nest, altered waterways to encourage shoreline feeders and left snags in wild areas as nesting sites.

There's another thing you can do: plant a butterfly garden. Butterflies are beautiful to watch, and they provide excellent food for birds. Since you will plant some annual flower gardens around the course this summer anyway, why not select species that attract butterflies? Butterfly gardens have become very popular in the past few years. And even the most serious golfers enjoy pausing for a moment to watch a swallowtail flit by, or 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, but butterflies prefer herbaceous plants because of their more continuous supply 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 you don't have caterpillars, you won't have butterflies). Most of these annuals also have flat or open flowers that butterflies can access with their short mouthparts. These plants also flower most of the summer, providing nectar for butterflies for 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 in June, you should be able to find many of these plants through a local

grower.

Butterfly weed, (*Asclepias curassavica*) is an outstanding and underused plant. In past years it was less common, but more growers produce it now because of the popularity of butterfly gardens. Butterflyweed is a close relative of the common milkweed, so it has milky sap, strong straight stems and flat-topped clusters of small flowers. In fall, it produces pods filled with wind-dispersed seeds. Butterflyweed, which reaches 30" in height, is sometimes called "Bloodflower" because of its mid-to-late summer orange-red flowers, but some gold-colored cultivars, like 'Silky Gold,' have recently been introduced. I've trialed 'Silky Gold' as a cut flower, and found it to be reliable, uniform, high-yielding and a great host for monarch caterpillars and butterflies. 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 butterflyweed. 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 about 4' each summer. In all but the most protected sites in Minnesota it dies back to the ground in fall, and resprouts new shoots each year, thereby functioning much like an herbaceous perennial. But in open, cold locations and in northern Minnesota, it dies in the winter and should be treated as an annual, grown from cuttings. Even where it functions as an annual, it is 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, (*Comos 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.

(Continued on Page 6)

Butterflies—

(Continued from Page 5)

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. 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, forms a loose 12" mound of foliage, with flowers rising to 24" on wiry stems. They make great cut flowers, and add an element of movement as they sway in the breeze. Occasional deadheading helps keep them in color. Annual blanketflower performs best in perfectly drained soil, and it tolerates droughty summer conditions well.

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.

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 reliable 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 a garden.

Sweet Alyssum, (*Lobularia maritima*) is a popular edging plant. Pinks and lavender cultivars are available, but the white ones are still the best. This fragrant little plant is a member of the mustard family; like most of its relatives, it performs best in cool weather. That means that it flowers 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 the hot summers of the Upper Midwest, it generally stops flowering in summer. In those locations it can be sheared back to 2-3" in height, and allowed to produce another 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 frequented by butterflies and hummingbirds.

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 foliage. Swallowtail butterflies' caterpillars feed voraciously on the foliage of parsley. 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 high performance plant.

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 unequalled 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. One type is the "milliflora," represented by a 1996 AAS winner: 'Fantasy Pink Morn.' This petunia has even smaller flowers than the multifloras 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 of course, you would have to have been absent from the outdoors 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 Surfina,[®] Wonder Falls,[®] Supertunia[®] or Cascadia.[®] These are all propagated from cuttings, but there is one more 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. The "new petunias" require full sun, well-drained soil and 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 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 marginal frosts of the fall. One excellent cultivar is 'Victoria,' which reaches 18" in height and flowers quite freely. A newer type that is a bit more unusual and very desirable is 'Strata,' an AAS winner for 1996. This cultivar produces silver sepal 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 very floriferous. All of the salvias attract many butterflies,

(Continued on Page 7)

Butterflies—

(Continued from Page 6)

but the blue salvias are 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 8-16" 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 Marigold, (*Tagetes tenuifolia*) is less known than French or 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 in lack of maintenance. It is the one marigold that does not require deadheading to produce all season. A line of these plants at the edge of a garden is attractive all season. There is one caution, however; the plants are not as uniform as the other marigolds, and you must select uniform seedling at planting time in order to achieve a high-quality planting.

The verbeneas have long been popular landscape annuals, known for their intense colors. A rather new and unique one is *Verbena speciosa* 'Imagination.' This plant won an AAS award in 1993, for its very fine-textured foliage, its low spreading habit (it easily spreads to 24" diameter by midsummer, with a height of 6") and its intense purple flowers. This is an interesting annual for some locations, and it attracts good numbers of butterflies and other insects, but there are two cautions. First, it tends to produce an intense array of flowers that peak in color in mid-August, and then diminish in color for the rest of the season; every stem seems to root vigorously.

Zinnias are wonderful annuals for the cutting garden, but they pose some serious challenges on the golf course: powdery mildew and fungal leaf spots can devastate the plants in a humid season. But one species of zinnia, the "Narrow-leaved Zinnia" (*Zinnia angustifolia*), is highly resistant to the fungal problems. It produces 1.2" yellow or white flowers all season, regardless of deadheading. The plants are upright and bushy, 24" tall and very free-flowering. Like most members of the daisy family, it 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 15 spider flowers in the middle, 30 geraniums around them and an edging of sweet alyssum around them would be more effective than a garden 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 glove amaranths, and edged with parsley. In this garden, gomphrena would flower most of the season, parsley would provide caterpillar food all season, and the buddleia would produce great color and attract many species of butterflies from mid-August until hard frost.

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 in August.

3. You could plant a brightly colored garden that would attract a wide range of butterflies with a central area of 'Silky Gold' butterflyweed 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 either 'Imagination' verbena or 'Purple Wave' petunia. Either would be quite stunning and would require little maintenance during the summer.

Introducing The Perfect Bag For Greens And Tees.



For overseeding low cut areas and establishing greens and tees, no other fertilizer provides the kind of coverage and nutrient distribution that Country Club 10-18-18 does.

Country Club
10-18-18 

FRANK BADEN
Territory Manager
Bettendorf, Iowa
(319) 332-9288