

'SOFT LANDINGS' MAKE MOWED LAWNS MORE BUTTERFLY-FRIENDLY

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PROBLEM:

After feeding on native tree foliage, many moth and butterfly caterpillars spend their next life cycle stage (pupae) in the leaf litter or soil below the tree. Regularly mowed turf grass under trees lacks the necessary habitat for them to complete their life cycles. Frequent mowing leads to compacted soil.



SOLUTION: SOFT LANDINGS

Planting intentional soft landings under native oaks (or any tree) builds healthy soil, provides food for songbirds and pollinators, sequesters more carbon than turf grass, and reduces time spent mowing. It also provides refuge for beneficial insects: beetles, native bees and lacewings, plus fireflies that overwinter underground.

- **Smother Existing Turf Grass. Do not dig out existing turfgrass under the tree.** You could damage the roots and trunk. If you still have grass under the tree, in autumn, smother it by laying thick, moistened newspaper or cardboard over it, then add a thick layer of leaves and small branches to hold it in place. Your soft landings will be ready to plant in 3 to 6 months.
- **Start Planting Leaf Litter Layer** In autumn, rake excess leaves into tree's dripline (area under the horizontal reach of the tree's branches.) Cover soil under trees with natural materials—leaves, twigs, and plant debris. **Do not add any**



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soil or compost on the roots (create a raised bed). ***Tree root systems are 'lungs' and need to be able to breathe!***

- Many trees have shallow roots so be careful to avoid damaging the tree while planting. **Buy small plants** (plugs or cell packs) and use a small trowel to carefully dig the holes. ***Avoid using a shovel or digging large or deep holes.*** Alternatively, the area can be seeded once undesirable vegetation is removed.
- **Stay away from the Tree Trunk.** Avoid planting within three feet of the tree trunk to prevent damaging the primary roots and root flares. Plants will fill this void once established. Keep leaves, twigs, and mulch away from the trunk to avoid excess moisture leading to bark rot.