

NATIVE PLANT NOTES

MONARCHS & MILKWEED



Introduction

The monarch migration is one of the most magnificent and intriguing of all natural phenomena. Monarchs migrate to Mexico each fall from the central and eastern United States to overwinter in forested areas in mountains west of Mexico City. Amazingly, these insects migrate to a location never seen to them before. After a period of 5 months in Mexico, the butterflies travel 1,500 miles back to breed in the United States and Canada.

Unfortunately, the very existence of the eastern North American Monarch is under threat due to logging at the overwintering sites in Mexico and the loss of habitat due to development, land management practices, and chemically-aided agriculture in the United States. The eastern Monarch population has experienced a precipitous decline over the past several years – they are in desperate need of help.

Life History of the Monarch Butterfly

The female Monarch lays her eggs on milkweeds that the caterpillars will then eat. The poisonous compounds found in milkweed leaves makes both the larvae and adults unpalatable to predators.

Adult Monarchs feed on flower nectar. They search out their favorite flowers with good color vision, a sense of smell that operates through their antennae, and a sense of taste that operates through structures on their feet. It is these adults, born in the United States in summer, that will make the fall migration to Mexico and serve as the reproductive adults for the following season.

How Can You Help the Monarchs?

Monarchs undergo a long overwintering period and a strenuous migration before they return to our own backyards and neighborhoods, but we all can play a very important role in their life cycle. Providing milkweeds and other nectar producing native plants in your landscapes is the first step in ensuring a successful population of butterflies. The following are key steps to developing successful conditions for Monarch butterflies at your home, school or place of business:

- Plant milkweeds. Milkweeds are the “host plant” of the Monarch butterfly – the butterflies require these plants to lay eggs, and the larvae require the plants for survival.
- Plant other nectar producing plants. Be sure to include plants that bloom in early spring and in late fall. Other nectar sources are often in short supply during these periods.
- Supplement your garden or patio with native plants. Butterflies don’t mind where the food is located!
- All butterflies seek protection from strong winds. Consider placing milkweeds and other nectar producing plants near background shrubs, or near foundation plantings.
- Monarchs and Milkweeds alike enjoy full sun. Try to locate your milkweeds and nectar plants in a sunny location.
- Avoid Pesticides. Pesticides are not species specific; unfortunately Monarchs are just as susceptible to these products as unwanted pests.

We Are Here to Help

ASWP is providing Common Milkweed seeds to help jump-start the local host plant availability. A seed packet may accompany this document, or can be made available by contacting us or stopping by our Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve. Each packet contains a handful of seeds which can be planted in any area of your yard, in a garden or container. To plant, sprinkle on the soil surface in a sunny location (don't cover seeds), and keep moist. ASWP is also tracking the success of our milkweed campaign by asking for some feedback. We request that you email us with some simple information so we may better measure and understand the impact we are making. Send us your GPS coordinates or the mailing address where milkweeds were planted at milkweed@aswp.org

Good Native Nectar Plants for Monarchs

Spring

Common Name	Scientific Name	Height/Color	Comments
Nodding Onion	<i>Allium cernuum</i>	1'/pink	Rocky, dry
Pussytoes	<i>Antennaria sp.</i>	6"/white	Full sun
Wild Strawberry	<i>Fragaria virginiana</i>	6"/white	Nice fruit
Wild Geranium	<i>Geranium maculatum</i>	12"-16"/pink	Likes some shade
Stonecrop	<i>Sedum ternatum</i>	6"/white	Likes some shade

Summer

Common Name	Scientific Name	Height/Color	Comments
Tall Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis tripteris</i>	6'/yellow	Birds like seeds
Thin-leaved Sunflower	<i>Helianthus decapetalus</i>	6'-8'/yellow	Birds like seeds
Oxeye Daisy	<i>Helianthus helianthoides</i>	5-8'/yellow	Long bloom time
Blazing Star	<i>Liatris spicata</i>	3'-4'/purple	Spiky flowers
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>	3'/scarlet	Also attracts hummingbirds
Bee Balm	<i>Monarda didyma</i>	4'/scarlet	Also attracts hummingbirds
Phlox spp.	<i>Phlox spp.</i>	various	Fragrant

Fall

Common Name	Scientific Name	Height/Color	Comments
Joe-Pye Weed	<i>Eutrochium sp.</i>	6'/mauve	Large flower clusters
Helen's Flower	<i>Helenium autumnale</i>	4'/yellow	Likes moisture
Green-headed Coneflower	<i>Rudbeckia lacinata</i>	8'-12'/yellow	Self-seeding
Black-eyed Susan	<i>Rudbeckia triloba</i>	3'-5'/yellow	Long bloom time
Goldenrod spp.	<i>Solidago spp.</i>	3'-5'/yellow	Many species
Aster	<i>Symphyotrichum spp.</i>	4-8'/white-purple	Many species
Ironweed	<i>Vernonia sp.</i>	6' - 8'/purple	Easy care

Some Important Larval Plants

Common Name	Scientific Name	Height/Color	Comments
Tall or Poke Milkweed	<i>Asclepias exaltata</i>	3-4'/pale pink	Less common
Pink Milkweed	<i>Asclepias incarnata</i>	3-4'/pink	Damp Soil
Common Milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>	3-5'/pink	Average Soil
Butterfly Milkweed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	3'/orange	Slender leaves

Shrubs for Butterflies

Common Name	Scientific Name	Height/Color	Comments
Swamp azalea	<i>Azalea arborescens</i>	3-7'/white with pale pink	Slow growing
Buttonbush	<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	8-12'/cream white	Moist locations
Nine bark	<i>Physocarpus opulifolius</i>	6-10'/pink	peeling bark
Viburnum	<i>Viburnum sp.</i>	5-14'/white	Fruit also good for birds