

# FUN FACTS ABOUT MILKWEED & MONARCHS



Photo courtesy of: Carly Scaduto



Monarch Caterpillar



Adult Monarch



Monarchs overwintering on Oyamel trees in Mexico

# Amazing Monarchs

## **The Journey.**

Monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) are unique in the butterfly world and known for their spectacular migration which covers thousands of miles. Every fall, monarchs from the eastern U.S. and southern Canada fly south to spend the winter in Mexico. At elevations around 10,000 ft, the monarch butterflies cluster in oyamel fir trees for warmth and survive primarily off their stored energy (lipid) resources. In spring, these monarchs fly north with the warming weather. New generations of monarchs are born along the way, from Texas to Canada, as they travel north throughout spring and summer. Monarchs born in late summer/early fall differ from their parents and grandparents in that they are ready for the long migration south. This generation of monarchs will not reproduce until the following spring, and require lots of nectar along the way to build up their energy resources for the long flight and winter in Mexico.

## **The Challenge.**

Monarch butterflies that migrate to Mexico each year face a wide array of challenges that collectively have contributed to a decline in the size of the overwintering population compared to the 20-year average. Along the monarch migration route, milkweed and nectar resources are essential to monarch success.

By planting habitat with native wildflowers (nectar sources) and milkweed we can help sustain the wondrous migration of the monarch butterfly. Monarch butterfly habitat is also good for many other species including honey bees, native bees, and birds. Planting a habitat is a great way to increase biodiversity in your area.

# COMMON MILKWEED



Photos courtesy of: Dan Childs

## DID YOU KNOW ?



**Fun Fact:** Milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.) are the host-plant for monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*). Monarch butterflies only lay their eggs on milkweed plant leaves and monarch caterpillars (larvae) feed exclusively on milkweeds until they pupate into adults. Adult monarchs also feed on the nectar of milkweed flowers. Their visits between milkweed plants also help spread milkweed pollen. Monarchs can spend their entire life cycle on milkweeds from egg, to larvae, to chrysalis (cocoon), to adult butterfly.

### Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*)

**Alternate Name:** Virginia-silk, silky swallowwort, silkweed, butterfly flower

**Flowering Dates:** June through August

**Pollinator Info:** attracts bees, butterflies and flies

**Invasive Status:** Not listed

**Plant Description:** Milkweed Family.

Perennial. Stems 2 to 5 feet tall, erect, hairy, containing a milky sap. Leaves opposite, broadly ovate, prominently veined, up to 8 inches long, containing a milky sap. Flowers are pinkish-white in a round, ball-like cluster in axils of upper leaves.

# BUTTERFLY MILKWEED



Photo courtesy of: Dan Childs

## DID YOU KNOW ?



**Fun Fact:** Milkweeds get their name from their milky sap and contain toxins called cardenolides that monarchs ingest and use as a defense against predators. These chemicals make the monarchs toxic and bitter-tasting. The bright colors of the monarch larvae and butterfly - known as aposematic coloring - serve as a warning to potential predators to stay away. Other butterflies such as the Queen Butterfly (*Danaus gilippus*) - which is closely related to monarchs - also feed on milkweeds, accumulate the toxins, and have similar bright coloration.

### **Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)**

**Alternate Name:** Canada root, chiggerflower, Indian paintbrush, orange milkweed, butterflyweed

**Flowering Dates:** June through August

**Pollinator Info:** attracts bees, butterflies, flies and hummingbirds

**Invasive Status:** Not listed

**Plant Description:** Milkweed Family.

Perennial. Bushy-plant type that grows 1.5 to 2 feet tall. No milky sap for this milkweed species. Leaves are alternate, numerous on the stem, linear to oblong, with upper surface dark green in color. Showy, orange flower clusters at the top of the plant.

# SWAMP MILKWEED



Photos courtesy of: Dan Childs



## DID YOU KNOW ?



**Fun Fact:** The milkweed plant is not just for monarchs. The genus name, *Asclepias*, comes from the Greek god of medicine, Asclepius, and refers to medicinal uses of milkweed. Historically, milkweed roots, stems, and even sap were used by native people to treat different ailments and as food. Proper preparation of the milkweed was required to ensure the toxins were removed! Additionally, fibers from the milkweed stem have been used to make paper. The fluff from milkweed pods is incredibly soft, insulating, and buoyant and has been used in everything from pillows, winter jackets, and even floatation devices.

### Swamp Milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)

**Alternate Name:** rose or pink milkweed, white Indian hemp

**Flowering Dates:** June through August

**Pollinator Info:** attracts bees, butterflies and flies

**Invasive Status:** Not listed

**Plant Description:** Milkweed Family.

Perennial. Stems erect, 2 to 4 feet tall, smooth, contains a milky sap. Leaves long, lance-shaped, opposite, with a pointed tip. Flowers pink-rose in color, borne in clusters at top of plant.



## MONARCH WORD SEARCH

All the words below were used in this book to tell the story of monarchs and milkweeds. If a word is new to you, look it up!

Y O V B D A K T H C M T F V X  
S L F K D E F O H N E R H R J  
B X F A N S E R Y H X A D G V  
J I N R E O Y W W A I T Q T D  
A A O N E S I S K G C C R V F  
C S U D A T C T U L O E V H M  
D V C L I R T I A Z I N M C C  
Z A I L O V L U R R H M V R K  
R S N S E I E Q B Z G A A A C  
G L C A Z P L R N C N I L N M  
W F Z C U J I V S W G A M O O  
S A X E T S M A O I R M G M U  
R O T A D E R P S V T A M K U  
S J I S A M B O A D Z Y G R I  
Q C X K A F Y E P X J D G M E

ASCLEPIAS  
BUTTERFLY  
CHRYSALIS  
LARVAE  
MIGRATION  
MONARCH  
PREDATOR

BIODIVERSITY  
CANADA  
DANAUS  
MEXICO  
MILKWEED  
NECTAR  
TEXAS



Monarchs are a symbol for modern agriculture that is more productive, uses fewer resources and values native habitat to preserve biodiversity.



## Monarch migration map



Missouri is part of the eastern population of monarch butterflies which migrate to overwintering grounds in central Mexico.

**Modern Ag.org:**  
<https://modernag.org/>



**Monsanto.com/sustainability:**  
<https://monsanto.com/sustainability>

