



Monarch Butterflies

Northern Great Plains

During spring and summer, monarchs breed throughout the U.S. and southern Canada. In the fall, adults of an eastern population migrate to Mexico, flying up to 3,000 miles. In the western U.S., monarchs migrate to scattered groves along the coast of California. The following spring, these butterflies leave their overwintering sites and fly northward in search of host plants on which to lay their eggs. Female monarchs lay eggs on milkweeds and a few other plants in the dogbane family. As monarchs spread across North America, several generations of butterflies are produced. In Florida, some non-migratory individuals remain and breed year-round.

Sadly, population monitoring at overwintering sites in Mexico and California has documented a steady decline. Monarchs are threatened by loss and degradation of habitat, natural disease and predation, adverse weather and the ongoing decline of native milkweeds. Because of the monarch's migratory lifecycle, effective conservation strategies need to protect and restore habitat across their entire range.



Milkweeds

Asclepias speciosa
Showy Milkweed

Habitat: Dry to moist, well-drained soils: open woodlands, prairies, fields, roadsides, waste areas

Larval host plant, adult nectar source. Seed available from several vendors.

Asclepias pumila
Plains Milkweed

Habitat: Dry, well-drained sandy to rocky soils: prairies, grasslands

Larval host plant, adult nectar source. Plants and seeds not currently available.



Monarchs & Milkweeds



Asclepias incarnata
Swamp Milkweed

Habitat: Moist to wet soils: swamps, marshes, wet prairies, pond margins, roadside ditches

Larval host plant, adult nectar source. Plants and seeds available from several vendors.



Asclepias viridiflora
Green Comet Milkweed

Habitat: Dry to moist, well-drained soils: roadsides, thickets, open woods, woodland margins, prairie openings

Larval host plant, adult nectar source. Plants and seeds available from limited vendors.



Asclepias syriaca
Common Milkweed

Habitat: Well-drained soils: fields, roadsides, prairies, pastures, waste areas

Larval host plant, adult nectar source. Plants and seeds available from limited vendors.

Asclepias verticillata
Whorled Milkweed

Habitat: Dry to moist soils: prairies, pastures, roadsides, fields, open woods

Larval host plant, adult nectar source. Plants and seeds available from limited vendors.



In addition to providing a food source for monarch larvae, the showy flowers of milkweeds offer abundant, high quality nectar to many pollinators including bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. The handsome plants can also add interest and beauty to any landscape. Milkweeds are named for their milky latex sap, which contains alkaloids and cardenolides, complex chemicals that make the plants unpalatable to most animals. Milkweeds have fleshy, pod-like fruits that split when mature, releasing seeds. Each milkweed seed is attached to fluffy hairs, known as pappus, silk, or floss, that aid in wind dispersal.

Intensifying agriculture, development of rural lands and the use of mowing and herbicides to control vegetation have all reduced the abundance of naturally occurring milkweeds. This has resulted in a substantial loss of critical resources available for monarchs throughout much of the United States. As a result, the North American Monarch Conservation Plan recommends planting native milkweed species to help restore breeding habitat. Sites of any size or location can help, from urban parks, schools and home gardens to commercial developments, municipalities and rural roadsides.

While native milkweeds are crucial for monarchs, commercial sources of plants and seeds remain limited. The Florida Museum of Natural History, the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, Butterfly Conservation Initiative and the Monarch Joint Venture are working to help raise awareness and produce reliable sources of native milkweed. Inventory is expected to increase steadily over the next several years, to meet demand for home gardens and habitat restoration projects across the region.



Ask for native milkweeds at your local retail garden center!
Be sure to ask for plants that have not been treated with pesticides, which may make them toxic to monarchs and other insects.

Butterfly Larvae & Host Plants



Black Swallowtail
Papilio polyxenes



Anise Swallowtail *Papilio zelicaon*

Spotted Water Hemlock
Cicuta maculata



Coral Hairstreak *Satyrrium titus*

Western Tiger Swallowtail *Papilio rutulus*
Tiger Swallowtail *Papilio glaucus*
Chokecherry *Prunus virginiana*



Two-tailed Swallowtail
Papilio multicaudata

Green Ash
Fraxinus pennsylvanica



Viceroy
Limnitis archippus

Eastern Cottonwood
Populus deltoides



Gray Hairstreak *Strymon melinus*

Twogrooved Milkvetch
Astragalus bisulcatus



American Lady
Vanessa virginiensis

Small-leaf Pussytoes
Antennaria parvifolia



Spring Azure *Celastrina ladon*
Redosier Dogwood *Cornus sericea*



Regal Fritillary
Speyeria idalia

Prairie Violet
Viola pedatifida



Gorgone Checkerspot
Chlosyne gorgone

Prairie Sunflower
Helianthus petiolaris



Common Wood-Nymph *Cercyonis pegala*

Little Bluestem *Schizachyrium scoparium*



Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*



Wavyleaf Thistle
Cirsium undulatum



Pearl Crescent
Phyciodes tharos

White Heath Aster
Symphotrichum ericoides



Melissa Blue
Plebejus melissa

Silvery Lupine
Lupinus argenteus



Variegated Fritillary *Euptoieta claudia*

Stiffstem Flax *Linum rigidum*



Milbert's Tortoiseshell
Aglais milberti

Red Admiral
Vanessa atalanta

Stinging Nettle
Urtica dioica



Silver-Spotted Skipper
Epargyreus clarus

Black Locust
Robinia pseudoacacia



Northern Cloudywing
Thorybes pylades

American vetch
Vicia americana



Weidemeyer's Admiral
Limnitis weidemeyerii

Quaking Aspen
Populus tremuloides