

## What Can One Do to Help the Monarchs?

We've heard the saying that a butterfly's wings can make storms across the globe; such a tiny action leads to a massive outcome. What if we could affect the world just as much with just simple plants instead of the beat of wings? People have enjoyed the Monarch's beauty for generations and watching as they brave the journey to the Sierra Madre Mountains. This, however, may not be possible for long as Monarch populations have been in "decline for the last 20 years; this is an estimated 90% loss to a previously high population"(Kentucky Afield 2018). So how can a person without access to acres of land help the survival of the majestic Monarch? Many experts say planting milkweed helps Monarchs lay eggs, which ultimately increases the population. One way to help is by adding native plants around one's yard to greatly increase the Monarch's chance of making the journey. Setting up waystations for Monarchs is another method to assist on their way to their winter home.

Planting the choice pollinator for monarch butterflies to lay their eggs -- milkweeds -- can help immensely with preventing their population from declining. When people think of important things to a butterfly, nectar first comes to mind. It's their primary food -- their source of energy. Milkweeds on which to lay eggs, however, is equally important to female Monarchs. These eggs will become the first butterflies Kentuckians will see during the migration. Consequently milkweeds are vital in keeping the population from declining by providing food to caterpillars when they hatch (Kentucky Afield 2018). All want to be able to enjoy these beautiful insects and planting milkweed is an inexpensive, easy solution. There are many varieties of milkweeds to select, though it is best to pick from natives that would grow and thrive in the specific area. Nonetheless, it's important to make sure any pollinators receive at least six hours

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of sunlight to attract the butterflies. One way to keep Monarchs in an area is to plant milkweeds; it is a first step to help protect them (Rodgers, 2021).

It's not just about the milkweeds, though. Butterflies can also thrive with other native species. Food is what the Monarchs need as they migrate, so let's make sure they get what they need to survive. While planting nectar-bearing flowers for the butterflies, keep in mind these will bloom in different periods of the growing season. Ensure the earliest and latest of the migraters get what they need to complete their journey (Kentucky Afield 2018). Also consider using only native plants in gardens to not compromise the ecosystem and the butterflies. An easy way to do this is by checking local nurseries and investigating the availability of native plants in stock. The county extension office is also a great resource to find necessary information needed to start planting. Another benefit is that these native nectar producers help the local bee population!

Finally, one of the most important things one can do to help protect and keep these butterflies around for many years to come is by making waystations. These important waystations have everything butterflies need to make their journey from egg to adult (Kentucky Afield 2018). Many monarchs will use waystations as they make their way back and forth to rest and replenish. Ensure the installation is done properly with native plants and pollinators in mind. Many worry about not having enough land, but expansive acres are not needed to make a functional waystation; a simple garden of 100 square feet, 10 feet by 10 feet is ample space. This can even be broken up into small patches around a yard (Kentucky Afield 2018). If that space is not available in residential areas, waystations can be built at local schools or libraries (Monarch Watch). So what's the excuse to not help these vulnerable butterflies on their journey? A final thing one can do to put effort into preserving the monarchs is by registering a waystation with Monarch Watch.

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With all of these Kentucky native plants for nectar to feed the hungry butterflies and milkweeds to help females lay eggs, there's no excuse to ignore helping the majestic Monarchs on their migration and providing the perfect safe haven for hungry caterpillars and butterflies on their way to the Sierra Madre Mountains. With the many easy and feasible solutions, one can help protect these beautiful butterflies for generations to come while creating green spaces. With all of the native plants and waystations, these Monarchs will be able to be appreciated in all of their glory.

Works Cited:

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"Monarch Waystation Program"

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