

## **Attracting Monarchs in Oklahoma with Milkweed**

Want your garden to be aflutter with monarch butterflies? Monarch butterflies are amazing creatures that migrate thousands of miles every year. They need milkweed plants to survive, so if you want to attract them to your garden, plant one or more of the milkweed species that are native to Oklahoma. They are attracted to milkweeds because they are the only plants that their caterpillars can eat. The caterpillars isolate the toxins from the milkweed in their bodies, which makes them poisonous to predators. This makes milkweeds an important food source for monarch butterflies and helps to ensure their survival.

The monarch butterfly is currently being considered for listing under the Endangered Species Act. The eastern North American monarch butterfly population migrates from summer breeding grounds in the midwestern U.S. and southern Canada to overwintering sites in central Mexico. Monarchs migrate through the southern Great Plains during spring and fall migration and reproduce in this region during spring and fall breeding periods. The monarch butterfly decline has been attributed to several factors, such as:

- **Habitat fragmentation, loss, and degradation (including milkweed loss)**
- **Overutilization**
- **Disease/predation**
- **Climate change**
- **Weather extremes**
- **Invasive species**
- **Pesticides**

The Oklahoma-Texas region has been identified as critical for conservation efforts, with an emphasis on milkweed and nectar resource availability.

Monarch butterflies are attracted to many different plants, but some of the most effective plants to attract them in Oklahoma include:

- **Common milkweed** (*Asclepias syriaca*) is the most common milkweed in North America and is found in a variety of habitats in

Oklahoma. It has showy, white flowers and produces copious quantities of seed pods. It is considered the most important host plant for monarchs in the southern Great Plains. It can be found along roadsides, in grasslands, hay meadows, pastures, rangelands, and vacant lots. It typically blooms from April through June and releases seeds in July. However, plants will re-grow (and bloom) following activities that remove the above ground portion of plants such as mowing or burning. The flowers are visited by many insects including bees and butterflies.

- **Swamp milkweed** (*Asclepias incarnata*) is found in wet areas such as marshes and meadows in Oklahoma. It has pink or purple flowers and produces smaller seed pods than common milkweed.
- **Butterfly weed** (*Asclepias tuberosa*) is a short-lived perennial that is found in prairies and open woodlands in Oklahoma. It has orange flowers and produces small, hairy seed pods.
- **Four-angled milkweed** (*Asclepias rhombipetala*) is found in dry, sandy areas, such as prairies and open woodlands in Oklahoma. It has small, white flowers and produces small, hairy seed pods.
- **Mexican milkweed** (*Asclepias curassavica*) is a non-native milkweed that is found in disturbed areas such as roadsides and vacant lots in Oklahoma. It has orange flowers and produces large, hairy seed pods.
- **Joe-Pye weed** (*Eupatorium fistulosum*) is a tall, native wildflower that is found in wet areas, such as marshes and meadows in Oklahoma. It has lavender or purple flowers and produces large, fluffy seed heads.

If you want to attract monarch butterflies to your garden, plant one or more of the milkweed species listed above. It would also be helpful to provide a source of water for the butterflies to drink.

To attract even more butterflies, you can also consider planting other nectar-rich plants, such as asters, goldenrods, and sunflowers to provide food for the adult butterflies.

- **Aster** (Aster spp.) is a large genus of native wildflowers that are found in a variety of habitats in Oklahoma. They have daisy-like flowers that come in a variety of colors including white, pink, purple, and blue.
- **Goldenrod** (Solidago spp.) is another large genus of native wildflowers that are found in a variety of habitats in Oklahoma. They have small, yellow flowers that bloom in the late summer and fall.
- **Sunflowers** (Helianthus spp.) are tall, native wildflowers that are found in open areas such as fields and roadsides in Oklahoma. They have large, yellow flowers that bloom in the summer.

### **SOURCES:**

<https://extension.okstate.edu/programs/oklahoma-proven/plant-profiles/milkweed.html>

<https://extension.okstate.edu/fact-sheets/oklahoma-proven-plant-selections-for-oklahoma.html>

<https://www.okiesformonarchs.org/what-to-plant-where-to-buy/>

<https://monarch.okstate.edu/>