

HORTICULTURE & PSYCHOLOGY

Lambright: Invite Monarch Butterflies into your garden

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The Chronicle-News

Twenty-five years ago, I was visiting Cape Cod during the fall monarch butterfly migration. There were so many monarchs fluttering around that standing still would guarantee some of them alighting on you. It was truly a magical experience that I've never forgotten! How sad that the National Wildlife Federation reported in 2018 that monarch populations have plummeted 90% in the last two decades. I hate to think that young people will never get to experience this spectacle of nature. I prefer to be an optimist, so let's consider some ways that we can help this most beloved of "flutter bys".

One of the main reasons for population decline is loss of habitat, especially the milkweed plant (*Asclepias* species). The adult butterfly must have milkweeds to lay their eggs on, as the caterpillar eats only milkweed. This provides both the caterpillar and adult protection from predators because of ingesting the plant's toxic steroids. Birds have learned to associate the black and orange color with a yucky taste, so other butterflies mimic that coloration for safety. Sneaky butterflies! It is understandable why ranchers would attempt to eradicate milkweed from areas where their livestock graze, but unless you regu-



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The distinctive stripes and black antennae identify this monarch caterpillar, above right, eating a milkweed plant. "Fireworks" goldenrod, above left, is a well-mannered goldenrod for your fall garden.

larly browse in your yard, there is no need to use an herbicide on this important plant. The milkweed flower is also a great source of nectar for many species of butterflies and other pollinators.

Another reason for the rapid decline is the increased use of insecticides without the understanding that not all "bugs" are harmful. Don't get me wrong, as I will reach for a least toxic product when those nasty green cabbage loopers start to decimate my broccoli. If you're killing a caterpillar, you're killing a butterfly or moth. Learn the distinctive stripes and double set of antennae on the larva and you won't have to worry

about destroying a hungry invader ready to decimate your tomatoes (you're thinking of tomato hornworm).

Adult monarchs feed on the nectar of other flowers as well. Including a wide variety of native flowering species with different bloom times will provide a food source for the monarchs to reproduce in the spring and summer, while providing energy for their fall migration back to Mexico or southern California. *Salvia*, *Indian blanket* (*Gaillardia*), *black-eyed Susan* (*Rudbeckia*) and *coneflowers* (*Echinacea*) provide food in the spring and summer. During the fall, our ubiquitous

rabbit brush is a magnet for many species of butterflies. Other fall blooming plants that are great sources of fuel for migrating butterflies are *blazing star* (*Liatris*), *goldenrod*, *aster*, *hummingbird mint* (*Agastache*), and *sunflowers*.

Speaking of mistaken identity, some of you may have been surprised to see goldenrod on the list of desirable plants. Why add something that would flare up allergies? Poor goldenrod has gotten a bad rap because it blooms the same time as ragweed, the real culprit. They even grow together in the wild, but ragweed is rather nondescript with inconspicuous blooms. Sneaky ragweed! Golden-

rod's pollen is large, meaning it is designed to be carried by pollinators. Ragweed's pollen is quite small, indicating it is windborne, just like our cedar pollen in early spring.

Further information can be found at Monarch Joint Venture, Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, and the National Wildlife Federation. You can even have your garden certified as a wildlife habitat through the National Wildlife Federation. One of my former clients in Austin went through the process and now proudly displays the sign as a justification for his leisurely gardening techniques. Sneaky gardener!

Thriving in Trinidad: Thriving through failure equals success



Dr. Sue Nesbitt
Trinidad State

When we look at the research on well being, it's easy to see that those characteristics and activities which make the biggest contributions are those that make us feel alive. Curiosity, love of learning, and play are examples.

Young children are naturally curious. They explore, question, and soak up knowledge at an unbelievable pace. They have not yet learned how they are supposed to learn. They just do it. They pay attention to what interests them and give it their full attention. They fail and, unless someone is around to criticize them for it, they as often as not just keep on without losing a beat.

I remember watching a toddler walking on a bumpy surface. She stepped into a small hole and fell, got up, walked back to where she started and did it again. This pattern continued several times until she finally

made it without falling. It was only then that she continued on with her original destination, a play area with a slide and swings.

Some of my college students have told me that growing up they spent far too much time taking tests. Interestingly, it was common for them to mention that some of the best teachers seemed as frustrated as the students by the emphasis on tests. We all know, of course, that when you take an exam you are not supposed to fail and every wrong answer is seen as a failure. What a difference from the child that learns through his or her mistakes.

I have had students work on projects that didn't go well. This is most likely to happen when they take on something big. In other words, those willing to take a risk may run into the most problems. When that happens, they are, understandably, worried about their grade so I have them write a paper describing what they learned from the experience. The result has included some outstanding insight that clearly revealed a great deal

gained from a failed project.

Students report learning everything ranging from remembering to check pens to be sure they have ink to paying attention to who in the group is best suited for specific tasks, having clear communication among members and more. I consider this a successful learning experience.

Avoiding failure is based on fear -- fear of being criticized or laughed at, fear of not being good enough. It isn't limited to education. We see it in families, careers, among friends, everywhere. Failures, however, mean we pushed ourselves beyond the familiar and comfortable. It means taking a chance.

Inventor Thomas Edison reportedly said that he didn't view his 10,000 first attempts at inventing the lightbulb as failures because he learned something about what wouldn't work. It is tempting to think that we thrive in spite of our failures but, as with the toddler, they can feed our curiosity and growth. Sometimes we thrive because of our failures.

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