

Mid-Elevation Arizona Monarch Waystations and Butterfly Gardens



Whether you have a small garden in the city or acres in nearby surrounding areas, you can draw butterflies to your yard to enjoy! While the mid-elevation in Arizona creates unique challenges, you can still enjoy the ephemeral beauty of these graceful visitors. In a world of vanishing habitats, butterflies will throng to your yard if you provide four basic requirements: nectar plants, host plants, a tree or large shrub for protection from the heat of the day or to spend the night and an occasional water source for “puddling.” In Arizona even monarchs will seek a water source with our dry climate.

Host Plants

Host plants, also called larval plants, are annuals or perennials where butterflies lay their eggs. As the tiny caterpillars hatch from the eggs they will consume the leaves and often the flowers as food. While hungry caterpillars can quickly defoliate a plant, new leaves quickly grow afterwards. You can enjoy watching the entire life span of butterflies in your yard by including host plants. Plus more butterflies will often linger in your yard looking for a mate or to find just the right place to lay their eggs. To qualify as a registered Monarch Waystation through Monarch Watch, plant at least ten milkweeds (*Asclepias spp.*) and include other host plants to draw a variety of other butterflies to your garden. Mass plantings are more noticeable and attractive to butterflies.

MILKWEEDS – MONARCH AND QUEEN BUTTERFLIES			
Host Plant	Botanical Name	Native?	Growing Needs
Antelope Horns or Spider Milkweed	<i>Asclepias asperula</i>	Yes	Full sun, low water
Horsetail Milkweed*	<i>Asclepias subverticillata</i>	Yes	Full sun; low water but prefers ditches with more
Butterflyweed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	Yes	Full sun but will thrive with some shade; meadows
Mojave Milkweed	<i>Asclepias nyctaginifolia</i>	Yes	Full sun; thrives in dry slopes and washes

SAMPLE OF HOST PLANTS – START WITH A FEW FAVORITES, THEN ADD MORE EACH YEAR.	
Butterfly	Host Plant
Dainty Sulphur	Dogweed, Cosmos
Fritillary	Violets
American Snout	Hackberry
Mourning Cloak	Willows, Quaking Aspen
Funereal Duskywing	Alfalfa, NM Locust
Pipevine Swallowtail	Pipevine
Skippers	Grasses
Cloudless Sulphur	Senna
Southern Dogface	Dalea, Alfalfa
Sleepy Orange	Senna
Two-tailed Swallowtail	AZ Rosewood, Hoptree
West Coast Lady	Cheeseweed, Mallows
Painted Lady	Hollyhocks, Thistles



Female monarch butterfly laying eggs on *Asclepias subverticillata*

*Best to grow in areas without cattle and horses.

Nectar Plants

All butterflies need nectar to sustain their adult life but not all flowers are created equal! Butterflies have favorites and they can vary by the season. They visit the desert in the spring, but late summer and fall are the premier seasons. For a wide variety of visitors, make sure there are flowering plants in your garden throughout the entire butterfly season. Clusters of several plants are most effective and visible to flying butterflies. Here is a sample of some nectar favorites.

Common Name	Botanical Name
Sunflowers, Tithonia	<i>Helianthus spp.</i>
Rabbitbrush	<i>Chrysothamnus nauseosus</i>
Mints	<i>Mentha spp.</i>
Zinnias	<i>Zinnia spp.</i>
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos spp.</i>
Butterflybush	<i>Buddleja spp.</i>
Verbena	<i>Verbena gooddingii</i>
Asters	<i>Aster spp.</i>
Fleabane	<i>Erigeron spp.</i>
Goldenrod	<i>Solidago spp.</i>
Cardinal Flower	<i>Lobelia cardinalis</i>
Western Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>
Coreopsis	<i>Coreopsis spp.</i>
Smooth Beggartick	<i>Bidens laevis</i>
Common Dandelion	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>
New Mexico Thistle	<i>Cirsium neomexicanum</i>
White clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>



Monarch butterfly feeding on Butterflyweed, *Asclepias tuberosa*

Important Note Regarding Pesticides

Many plant nurseries or their growers use systemic or topical pesticides on their plants to prevent insect damage on leaves. Remember that butterflies are insects too, and their caterpillars will not survive if they chew a treated leaf. Always ask your nursery if your plant has been treated with systemic or topical sprays.

When you maintain your butterfly garden, do not use any pesticides or insecticides. Even nearby spraying can drift onto your visiting butterflies' favorite plants. Instead, incorporate a variety of host and nectar plants to help keep pest levels down and allow the populations of natural predators to increase to reduce unwanted pests.

References

- Monarch Watch Waystation Program monarchwatch.org/waystations
- Monarch Watch Bring Back the Monarch Campaign monarchwatch.org/bring-back-the-monarchs
- SW Monarch Study swmonarchs.org
- North American Butterfly Association naba.org
- The Xerces Society xerces.org

This publication was created by the Southwest Monarch Study in support of the North American Monarch Conservation Plan advocating for the creation of Monarch habitats across Arizona and the Western United States.