



## Milkweed Planting Guide

Congratulations on your decision to create a milkweed habitat for monarch butterflies! To draw the most monarchs to your garden, plant milkweeds in clusters of at least ten plants. You can profit from our “Best Planting Techniques” based on the local experience of the Southwest Monarch Study, Signature Botanica and the successful planting of 980 milkweed by Friends of the Tonto National Forest. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions – we want your experience to be a positive one!

### Key tips for planting your milkweed plugs successfully:

1. Dig a hole as deep as the plant tube or pot and twice as wide.
2. Water the hole deeply before planting. Let the water soak in.
3. To remove the plant from the container, place your fingers over the top of the pot with the plant between your fingers. Invert the pot and gently tap the rim against a firm surface, like the tray it came out of. When the root ball comes loose from the pot, slide it out carefully and cradle the root mass to prevent it from falling apart. Add seedling to the hole and use native soil only (no amendments) and fill hole around the seedling. It’s helpful to have the plant in a slight depression or basin (about one inch deep and 12 inches or so wide) for gathering rain water.
4. Gently water plants after planting, and avoid making a divot (or hole) in the soil surface around the plant.

### Proper watering is crucial to seedling survival!\*

**Always** water each seedling **twice** for maximum benefit with **each** irrigation. Allow the water to soak in thoroughly between waterings. The first watering breaks the tension between the water and the soil, the second watering actually penetrates the soil more deeply. Again, be care not to leave a deep divot from the water pressure which just exposes more surface area to drying out.

Follow this watering schedule for best results. Day 1 is the first day after planting.

Day 2

Day 4 (2 days later)

Day 7 (3 days later)

Day 10 (3 days later)

Day 14 (4 days later)

Day 18 (4 days later)

Day 23 (5 days later)

Day 28 (5 days later)

Day 35 (7 days later)

Day 42 (7 days later)

Day 52 (10 days later)

Day 62 (10 days later)

Day 74 (2 weeks later)

Day 88 (2 weeks later)

\*Adjust watering if it rains. Note: if near-record high temperatures or drought occurs during the first two years until the native milkweed plants have matured, seedlings may benefit from additional water.

## How to water efficiently

If you use a hose or other irrigation, watering will be easy. If not, the Friends of the Tonto National Forest found it helpful to fill a storage bin with water and to dip gallon containers or small buckets in to get water refilled quickly. They learned by experience that the taller one gallon containers are almost completely useless as they collapse; regular milk jugs or strong tea jugs with an enlarged hole work very well. For large plantings, some groups had “waterers” and “water runners” so that the “waterers” could easily keep track of where they had watered and reduce the chance of plants being missed (it did happen).

## Aphids and other insects

Aphids are common on milkweeds. Rarely do they harm the plant and studies have shown that monarch butterflies still lay eggs on milkweeds with aphids. Aphids do not harm the eggs or caterpillars. We recommend not treating milkweeds for aphids unless absolutely necessary. Seasonally there is a small parasitic wasp that will lay their eggs in the aphids, eventually killing them. You want these friendly wasps in your habitat! When considering using insecticides, remember that monarchs are insects! Many “natural” insecticides also kill larvae. **Don't use them!**

If aphids become excessive with honeydew dripping on the ground below the plant you can reduce the population in two ways. First, check for any eggs or small larvae on the plants especially on the flowers or flower buds in addition to leaves. If they are absent you can use a strong stream of water to knock aphids off the plants. However, they often will reappear in reduced number afterwards. More time consuming but effective, use gloves and squish the aphids. This usually works best but is time consuming. You will still want to hose the branches down afterwards.

In general be aware of insecticides and herbicides around your Monarch Waystation habitat. Even when areas nearby are treated these chemicals can drift into your Waystation.

## Nectar Plants

Monarchs will lay eggs on milkweed before they are in bloom so nectar plants are critical to your habitat. During the fall, monarchs are not breeding and fall nectar sources are crucial to build lipids (fats) so they can survive their migration and long overwintering season without additional food sources. Be sure to add seasonal nectar for butterflies to enjoy.

Please see our Regional Planting Guides for native and garden recommendations on our website:

<https://www.swmonarchs.org/waystations.php#regionalplantingguides>

### For more information about Monarch Waystations:

- <https://www.swmonarchs.org/waystations.php>
- <https://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations>

Questions? Email us at [info@swmonarchs.org](mailto:info@swmonarchs.org) .

## Southwest Monarch Study

<https://www.swmonarchs.org>



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