

Help Save Monarch Butterflies – Population dropped 90% in 20 years!

Monarch butterflies are in serious trouble. Their population has dropped 90 percent over the past two decades. One major problem is that agricultural chemicals have killed most milkweed plants. **If you want to help save the beautiful monarchs, plant native milkweed seeds in your yard in November to early December.** Here's a list of **milkweeds native to Missouri**: butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), common milkweed (*A. syriaca*), swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*), tall green milkweed (*A. hirtella*), and whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*).

Each year monarch butterflies go through **four life-cycle changes** and **four different generations** to ensure their long-term survival. The stages in the monarch butterfly life cycle are **egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, and adult butterfly**. Eggs for the four generations are laid in March-April, May-June, July-August, and September-October. Each of the first three generations of adult butterflies lives only about two to six weeks before laying eggs and dying.

In each generation, female monarchs lay just a few eggs on milkweed plants so there are enough leaves for the larvae to eat. Monarch caterpillars **only eat milkweed leaves** so unless enough milkweed plants are available monarchs will not be able to survive. After reaching about 2½ inches in length, the caterpillars form a chrysalis and take 2-3 weeks to metamorphose into adults. After the adult emerges from the chrysalis, they live for 2-6 weeks.

When the fourth monarch generation is born in September-October, it goes through the same process as the first three generations except those adult butterflies do not die after 2-6 weeks. Instead, they migrate to central Mexico and live for 6-8 months until they migrate north and start the whole process over again.

Helping the monarchs recover is easy: **Plant native milkweeds in your garden/yard with a variety of nectar yielding native flowering plants with different bloom times to provide the food adult monarchs need to reproduce and for their migration.**



Monarch caterpillar forming a chrysalis and then emerging as an adult butterfly. Source: <http://www.monarch-butterfly.com/> Updated: May 2021

More information: <http://monarchjointventure.org/>; <http://www.xerces.org/milkweed/>; <http://www.monarch-butterfly.com/>; <http://grownative.org/native-plant-info/>

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