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Garden Patch
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Protect The Monarchs

The monarch butterfly population is declining. Why should we care? As with all species, there are consequences to their loss. Foremost, butterflies are pollinators. Their decline is coinciding with a decrease in other pollinator species, which negatively affects crop production.

Second, monarchs share the same shrinking habitat as other pollinators and wildlife. This means that the amount of milkweed and other native plants that wildlife depend upon for survival is declining. A diminishing monarch population is a “signal” — a sign that species sharing similar habitat are also threatened. What’s happening to the monarch is emblematic of the broad challenges we all face as stewards of the land and greater environment.

Monarchs are a migratory phenomenon. They travel 2,000 – 3,000 miles between the United States and Canada to central Mexico mountain forests where they overwinter. They depend upon flowering nectar sources to fuel their journey. Also, the females deposit their eggs on milkweed plants, upon which the developing larvae and caterpillars feed. Encouraging the growth of milkweed and other native plants aids monarchs in their yearly migration.

The loss of habitat for breeding, migrating and overwintering is perhaps the largest reason for a steep decline in the monarch population. Other causes include the increased use of pesticides and herbicides on agricultural land and in residential areas, more roadside mowing, deforestation in Mexico and California, industrialization and pollution. Climate changes may be forcing changes in migratory patterns and making some habitat less suitable. Monarchs also face risks from natural predators and diseases.

The spread of non-native plant species also affects monarch butterflies, particularly tropical milkweed. Tropical milkweed, when allowed to flourish year-‘round, often harbors a protozoan that can cause monarchs to be infected with a debilitating parasite. To minimize this risk, trim tropical milkweed in late fall and keep it to a height of six inches or less until spring. This practice also encourages butterflies to migrate south.



More than beautiful, monarch butterflies contribute to the health and well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants. To help monarchs survive, incorporate native plants into your landscape. In communities, provide and manage a space for native grasses, wildflowers and milkweed. Limit chemical use. And educate others.