

# 5 steps for a Certified Monarch Waystation

*Brought to you by Wild Ones Lexington Chapter and The Garden Club of Kentucky*

**Monarchs need milkweeds.** Milkweeds are the only plants the caterpillars can eat and the only plants on which the females will lay their eggs. Monarchs in the U.S. are in serious decline because of loss of habitat due to spraying of herbicides and development, both of which destroy milkweeds.

**The good news is that we can help!** Monarch Watch sponsors a Monarch Waystation program, challenging all of us to create habitat by planting milkweeds and nectar plants in our yards. And if you create habitat for monarchs, you will also attract other butterflies and pollinators.

Here's how to get started:

- 1. Determine size and location:** Butterfly plants need sun. There is no required size, but Monarch Watch suggests a minimum of 100 square feet. The total area may be split into several locations.
- 2. Plant 10 or more milkweed plants.** A monarch waystation requires a minimum of 10 milkweed plants, preferably two or more species. Milkweeds that bloom at different times increase the chances for seeing monarchs over a longer period.
- 3. Plant a minimum of 4 nectar plants.** Providing nectar throughout the growing season will increase your chances of attracting monarchs as well as other butterflies and pollinators. Nectar plants may be trees, shrubs, or wildflowers. Fall-blooming plants, such as asters and mist plant, are especially important to monarchs and other butterflies that migrate, such as buckeyes, and red admirals. Native perennials attract more butterflies.
- 4. Management practices** which are encouraged include the following:
  - Manage the density of plants – relatively close together though not crowded, in order to provide shelter for caterpillars and chrysalises from predators and the elements.
  - Eliminate the use of insecticides and herbicides.
  - Remove old growth before the growing season, preferably in spring. Caution: Some butterflies overwinter in the garden as eggs, caterpillars, or chrysalises. Fall clean-up may destroy next year's butterflies.
- 5. Complete the certification application.** Register your garden as a Certified Monarch Waystation by completing the form at: <http://www.monarchwatch.org/waystations/certify.html>. Applications may be submitted online or printed to mail or fax. A \$16 processing fee is required for each certification. Your habitat will be included in an online registry of worldwide Monarch Waystations.

**NOTE:** You don't have to start from scratch. If you have an existing habitat that meets the requirements, or which can be modified to qualify, you can, and should, apply for certification. For additional information contact Linda Porter, [prairiegirl7@mac.com](mailto:prairiegirl7@mac.com)

## PROPAGATING MILKWEED

Propagating Milkweed from seed can be very challenging. Throughout the years I have had a tremendous amount of successes and failures. I love the rewards of propagating any plant from seed. What makes the Milkweed the most difficult is once it starts to germinate and grow it has a tendency to dampen off. I am not a professional propagator; I got hooked on seed germination after working in a native nursery after completing a Master Gardeners course. In this article, I will describe my experiences growing milkweed from seed.

**Collection:** Gather the seed pods in the summer after the Milkweed blooms. I have found it is best to pick the seed pod when it starts to split. Put the pods into a paper sack (never store any seed pod in plastic). They will still be moist, and will need to dry out totally to prevent the seed from mildew. If you have the time it is best to always clean the seed right away to avoid any insect infestation in the seed pod. (I normally do not have the time to do it right away so therefore I just keep them stored in a paper sack.) I never strip the plant of all seed pods. Typically, I will sprinkle seed and rake them into the soil, as a way to thank the mother plant and to promote more plants in the garden.

**Cleaning:** There are several ways to clean the seed pods. One way is to grasp hold of the pod on the silk end and try to just run fingers over the seed so they fall off. Sometimes shaking the seed in a paper sack will work. The problem is that the silk flies everywhere! My favorite (and the quickest) way is to scatter the seeds of one pod on a burnable surface and carefully light the silk (warning: the silk will immediately ignite; the first time I tried this I singed my hair!).

**Storing and planting:** You can store the seeds once they are cleaned and dried in damp sphagnum peat moss or coarse sand. I prefer the moss, as I have had the seeds actually sprout in the moss. The seeds can either be stored in the refrigerator until spring (preferably 90 days) then planted in a seed starter potting mix when it is above 70 degrees (Cullina, 2000). Place the seeds in a flat or pots and place in a warm sunny window or greenhouse. Make sure the soil is kept evenly moist and not too wet. I normally sprinkle sand over the top to help with damping off. Water the seeds by either sprinkling water on top so as not to wash the seeds away or water from the bottom.

Another way to plant the seeds after cleaning is direct sowing into the garden bed or plant the seeds into the seed flat and place the flat in an unheated greenhouse. (The seeds need to go through a cold cycle before sprouting.)

**Transplanting:** Once the seeds have their second set of leaves it is time to transplant them into individual pots. I have only transplanted the seedlings in a greenhouse, and once the plants have started growing vigorously I then gradually harden them off to the outside. New plants like to be kept watered and do not want to dry out. Fertilize the new plants about every two weeks with a light fertilizer. Make sure your Milkweeds are planted in a sunny location in well-drained soil. This is a general rule: *make sure you plant your specific Milkweed in the right location and soil.* There are some varieties that require more moisture in a garden bed and some may prefer part sun.

Enjoy growing your Milkweeds! Not only are you adding a spectacular native plant to your garden, but you are helping to save our beautiful Monarch Butterfly!!!

Tina Placek

*Native Plant Specialist, Springhouse Gardens, Nicholasville, KY*

### References

Cullina, W. (2000). *New England Wildflower Society Guide to Growing and Propagating Wildflowers of the United States and Canada.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.