

## MONARCH BUTTERFLY S.O.S

The western Monarch butterfly population, those showy orange and black beauties, has declined more than 99% in California.

There were an estimated 4.5 million of these butterflies in the 1980s, and now there are an estimated 28,400 according to what is referred to as the Western Monarch Thanksgiving Count of 2018



Monarch on Corn Lily © Craig Tooley

and confirmed by the New Year's Count of 2019. The projected threshold for collapse of the Western Monarch migration is 30,000 in number. The math is all too clear – we are below that threshold, and in great danger of losing this extraordinary butterfly.

In the past we have been blessed with two overwintering sites, Monarch Glen and the hedgerows north of Del Mar Center, where the Monarchs clustered on branches of protective trees. These areas provided the “Goldilocks Zone” of just enough protection from the storms, and just the right amount of light, water and nectar plants. Whether it is a matter of no longer providing these ideal conditions or simply the plummeting numbers of the population, there are few to none that overwinter now. They are still overwintering, however, in central and southern California. On a positive note, with climate change, our north coast may have a milder winter and become more attractive to the Monarchs in the future, if there are any left to carry on.

Monarchs have four generations in a year. The generation born in late summer/early fall will live 6-8 months, much longer than the previous three. They will migrate to their overwintering grounds and stay there until early February. Then they mate and fly inland, where the females lay their eggs on milkweed.

What can we do to help these beautiful Monarch butterflies to survive? First, there are two DO NOTS:

**Do not** use pesticides where butterflies and bees live and eat, meaning their “habitat”.

**Do not** plant milkweed, contrary to what you may have heard, as milkweed is the only plant in which Monarchs lay their eggs. They lay their eggs inland, where milkweed is native. So do not plant it here, as this is NOT the place that the eggs and caterpillars survive. An interesting aside, milkweed contains a toxin

which is passed on to the caterpillar and butterfly, and is poisonous to vertebrate animals, a trait that has helped them to survive.

**Do** plant nectar-rich flowering plants. Nectar flowers are those that have fluid that is the Monarchs’ food. The most important time of year for those blooms is from fall through early spring, when the Monarchs are most likely to be travelling through The Sea Ranch. It is best to plant large groups of one plant or group your butterfly plants in one area. A side benefit is if you’re making the Monarchs happy, most likely you’re pleasing other butterflies, bees and hummingbirds, too, throughout the year.

Native Plants (with comments) favored by Monarchs and approved by TSRA’s Design, Compliance and Environmental Management Department:



**Manzanitas, *Arctostaphylos sp.***: Shrubs and sub-shrubs, especially good because they bloom in winter and early spring when there are only a few nectar flowers available.

© Photo by Sue Trieb

**Ceanothus species**: Shrub of various sizes that can appear to be a cloud of sky-blue to deeper blue for many weeks. Also blooms early in the year.

© Photo by Sue Trieb



**Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium***: Perennial that is easy to grow and spreads well, but not invasive.

© Photo by Amy Ruegg

**Checkerbloom, *Sidalcea malviflora***: A showy pink perennial that blooms as early as March. © Photo by Amy Ruegg





**Seaside Daisy, *Erigeron glaucus*:** Lavender and yellow blooms, good in dry, sandy soil. © *Photo by Amy Ruegg*

**Coyote brush, *Baccharis pilularis*:** You probably don't have to plant this one, you already have it. Just don't pull it out and please treat it with a little respect by pruning it enthusiastically to control the dead wood. It is especially beneficial because its bloom time is September through January, when there are few other nectaring plants. © *Photo by Craig Tooley*



**California Aster, *Corethrogyne filaginifolia*:** Long season yellow-centered pinkish bloomer from June to October. © *Photo by Amy Ruegg*



**Madrone, *Arbutus Menziesii*:** Treasure this tree if you have one. They are in decline in this area, probably from fungi and insects. They do not transplant well, so not a good return on your money. ©2004 *Photo by Steven Lea*



**California and Coast Goldenrod, *Solidago velutina* and *S. spathulata*:** Late season deep yellow bloomers, falsely accused of causing sneezing in humans. © *Photo by Amy Ruegg*

**Arroyo Willow, *Salix lasiolepis*:** Also, a tree that you will not likely plant, but please value it, as flowers provide nectar. ©2008 *Photo by Keir Morse*



**Blue Dicks, *Dichelostemma capitatum*:** A precious bulb with bluish purple flowers blooming from February to April. © *Photo by Amy Ruegg*



**RESOURCES:**

- [www.xerces.org/monarchs](http://www.xerces.org/monarchs)
- [www.monarchjointventure.org](http://www.monarchjointventure.org)



**Coyote Mint, *Monardella villosa*:** A favorite of this author, a perennial mint that perfumes the air during the dry months of summer, with pinkish purple flowers, and a magnet for most butterflies. © *Photo by Amy Ruegg*

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