

Low Desert Monarch Waystations and Butterfly Gardens



Whether you have a small garden in the city or acres in nearby surrounding areas, you can draw butterflies to your yard to enjoy! While the low desert in Arizona creates unique challenges, you can still enjoy the ephemeral beauty of these graceful visitors. In a world of vanishing habitats, butterflies will throng to your yard if you provide four basic requirements: nectar plants, host plants, a tree or large shrub for protection from the heat of the day or to spend the night and an occasional water source for “puddling.”

Host Plants

Host plants, also called larval plants, are annuals or perennials where butterflies lay their eggs. As the tiny caterpillars hatch from the eggs they will consume the leaves and often the flowers as food. While hungry caterpillars can quickly defoliate a plant, new leaves quickly grow afterwards. You can enjoy watching the entire life span of butterflies in your yard by including host plants. Plus more butterflies will often linger in your yard looking for a mate or to find just the right place to lay their eggs. To qualify as a Monarch Waystation, plant at least ten milkweeds (*Asclepias spp.*) and include other host plants to draw a variety of other butterflies to your garden.

| MILKWEEDS – MONARCH AND QUEEN BUTTERFLIES | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Host Plant | Botanical Name | Native? | Growing Needs |
| Desert or Rush Milkweed | <i>Asclepias subulata</i> | Yes | Full sun, low water |
| Arizona or Narrowleaf Milkweed | <i>Asclepias angustifolia</i> | Yes | Morning sun only or full shade; low water |
| Bloodflower or Tropical Milkweed | <i>Asclepias curassavica</i> | No – but a monarch favorite | Morning sun only, medium water. Needs freeze protection. |
| Pine-needle Milkweed | <i>Asclepias linaria</i> | Yes | Grows best with filtered afternoon shade; low water. |

| SAMPLE OF HOST PLANTS – START WITH A FEW FAVORITES, THEN ADD MORE EACH YEAR. | |
|--|---------------------|
| Butterfly | Host Plant |
| Dainty Sulphur | Dogweed |
| Gulf Fritillary | Passion Vine |
| American Snout | Hackberry |
| Black Swallowtail | Dill, Rue |
| Giant Swallowtail | Citrus |
| Pipevine Swallowtail | Pipevine |
| Skippers | Grasses |
| Cloudless Sulphur | Senna |
| Southern Dogface | Dalea, Alfalfa |
| Sleepy Orange | Senna |
| Bordered Patch | Sunflowers |
| West Coast Lady | Cheeseweed, Mallows |
| Painted Lady | Hollyhocks |



Female monarch butterfly laying eggs

Nectar Plants

All butterflies need nectar to sustain their adult life but not all flowers are created equal! Butterflies have favorites and they can vary by the season. They visit the desert in the spring, but late summer and fall are the premier seasons. For a wide variety of visitors, make sure there are flowering plants in your garden throughout the entire butterfly season. Clusters of several plants are most effective and visible to flying butterflies. Here is a sample of some nectar favorites.

| Common Name | Botanical Name |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Sunflowers | <i>Helianthus spp.</i> |
| Lantana | <i>Lantana camara</i> |
| Sweet Bush | <i>Bebbia juncea</i> |
| Zinnias | <i>Zinnia spp.</i> |
| Butterfly Mist | <i>Ageratum corymbosum</i> |
| Wooly Butterflybush | <i>Buddleja marrubiifolia</i> |
| Verbena | <i>Verbena gooddingii</i> |
| Asters | <i>Aster spp.</i> |
| Spreading Fleabane | <i>Erigeron divergens</i> |
| Baja Fairyduster | <i>Calliandra californica</i> |
| Fern-leaf Lavender | <i>Lavandula canariensis</i> |
| Blue Mist, Dark Knight | <i>Caryopteris X Clandonensis</i> |
| Coreopsis, Tickseed | <i>Coreopsis lanceolata</i> |
| Bee Brush | <i>Aloysia gratissima</i> |
| Wolfberry | <i>Lycium berlandieri</i> |
| Rabbitbrush | <i>Chrysothamnus nauseosus</i> |
| Chaste Tree | <i>Vitex agnus-castus</i> |



Queen butterflies feeding on Desert Milkweed, *Asclepias subulata*

Important Note Regarding Pesticides

Many plant nurseries or their growers use systemic or topical pesticides on their plants to prevent insect damage on leaves. Remember that butterflies are insects too, and their caterpillars will not survive if they chew a treated leaf. Always ask your nursery if your plant has been treated with systemic or topical sprays.

When you maintain your butterfly garden, do not use any pesticides or insecticides. Even nearby spraying can drift onto your visiting butterflies' favorite plants. Instead, incorporate a variety of host and nectar plants to help keep pest levels down and allow the populations of natural predators to increase to reduce unwanted pests.

References

- SW Monarch Study swmonarchs.org
- Monarch Watch Waystation Program monarchwatch.org/waystations
- Monarch Watch Bring Back the Monarch Campaign monarchwatch.org/bring-back-the-monarchs
- North American Butterfly Association naba.org
- The Xerces Society xerces.org

This publication was created by the Southwest Monarch Study in support of the North American Monarch Conservation Plan advocating for the creation of Monarch habitats across Arizona and the Western United States.