

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, city park or nature area 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 registered Monarch Waystation through Monarch Watch, plant at least ten milkweeds (*Asclepias spp.*) and include other host plants and nectar plants to draw a variety of other butterflies to your garden. We always recommend native plants when available.

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
Pineneedle Milkweed	<i>Asclepias linaria</i>	Yes	Grows best with filtered afternoon shade; low water.
Arizona or Narrowleaf Milkweed	<i>Asclepias angustifolia</i>	Yes to SE AZ	Morning sun only or partial to full shade; low water

SAMPLE OF HOST PLANTS – START WITH A FEW FAVORITES, THEN ADD MORE EACH YEAR.	
Butterfly	Host Plant
Pipevine Swallowtail	Pipevine
Black Swallowtail	Dill, Rue, Parsley
Giant Swallowtail	Citrus
Cabbage White	Nasturtium, Cabbage
Sleepy Orange	Senna
Dainty Sulphur	Dogweed, Marigold
Cloudless Sulphur	Senna
Marine Blue	Baja Fairyduster
Fatal Metalmark	Virgin’s Bower
Gulf Fritillary	Passion Vine
Texan Crescent	Ruellia
Bordered Patch	Sunflowers
Painted Lady	Hollyhocks, Thistles
West Coast Lady	Cheeseweed, Mallows
American Snout	Hackberry



Female monarch butterfly laying eggs on *Asclepias subulata*

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 *Native
Common Sunflower	<i>Helianthus annuus</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 spp.*</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> 🦋
Cosmos	<i>Cosmos sulphureus</i> 🦋
Coreopsis, Tickseed	<i>Coreopsis californica</i> *
Bee Brush	<i>Aloysia gratissima</i> * 🦋🦋
Wolfberry	<i>Lycium fremontii</i> * 🦋
Tithonia	<i>Tithonia rotundifolia</i> 🦋
Mexican Flame Vine	<i>Senecio confuses</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.

Do not use any pesticides or insecticides. Even nearby spraying can drift onto your visiting butterflies' favorite plants. Many "natural" insecticides also kill larvae. 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

- Top Ten Key Findings of Status of *Danaus plexippus* in Arizona. www.swmonarchs.org
- Morris, Gail M., Christopher Kline, and Scott M. Morris. "Status of *Danaus plexippus* Population in Arizona." *The Journal of the Lepidopterists' Society* 69, no. 2 (2015): 91-107.
- Monarch Watch Waystation Program www.monarchwatch.org/waystations
- Monarch Nectar Plants Southwest
http://www.xerces.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/SW_Monarch_Plant_List_spread.pdf
- Nabhan, G., S. Buckley, and H. Dial. 2015. Pollinator Plants of the Desert Southwest: Native Milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.). USDA -Natural Resources Conservation Service, Tucson Plant Materials Center, Tucson, AZ. TN-PM-16-1- AZ.
- North American Butterfly Association www.naba.org

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 Southwestern United States. <http://www.swmonarchs.org>