

10 Amazing Facts About The Monarch Butterfly

1. The adult female monarch butterfly lays tiny eggs covered with a sticky substance on the underside of milkweed leaves, which are extremely toxic. The caterpillar hatches from its egg several days later and survives on these milkweed leaves.
2. The monarch caterpillar and adult butterfly retain the poison from the milkweed leaves in its body, thus protecting it from being eaten by predators.
3. Every spring, adult monarch butterflies head north from their winter respite in the southern forests of Mexico and California, and return in the fall—a journey some 2,000-3,000-miles each way!
4. The monarch butterfly will continue to feed, fly, and reproduce throughout the U.S. and southern Canada, for several generations. It is the fourth generation of monarch butterflies that actually migrate to Mexico in fall.
5. Monarch butterflies travel as much as 100 miles a day during its 3,000-mile migration south.
6. During its migration, each butterfly relies on the huge volume of food it ate when it was a caterpillar for fuel.
7. Monarchs smell with their antennae. Nectar and water are tasted by the sensory hairs on their legs and feet.
8. Monarch butterflies cannot bite, and drink through a long tongue called a *proboscis* that works like an eyedropper drawing up nectar. Like a retractable garden hose, its tongue coils up under its lower lip when not in use.
9. Once the Monarch butterfly is hatched, it only lives for approximately 2–6 weeks.
10. The monarch butterfly's bright colors serve as a warning to predators that they are poisonous, and they should attack at their own risk! Monarchs not only taste bad, but they are poisonous due to the presence of cardenolides (a type of steroid) in their bodies, which the caterpillars get from the milkweed they feed on.

Source Farmers' Almanac

Get a good start by reading circular 975, *Environmental Enhancement with Ornamental Plants: Butterfly Gardening*, at extension.uga.edu/publications

Be a Good Host This Summer

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This spring you will see countless butterfly garden articles using words like “nectar,” “pollinator,” and “flowers.” What you might not see in these documents are words like “native,” “habitat,” and “caterpillar.” While providing pollen is laudable, you are not being a very good host if you don't provide food for the butterfly through all 4 stages of its life cycle: egg, larva, chrysalis, and adult.

The butterfly has been poetically called, “a flying flower.” In reality, it is an insect, which, in its adult stage, lives 2-6 weeks. Nectar-rich plants like Echinacea, coreopsis, and lantana attract the

beautiful fluttering adult. However, the challenge is to provide specific foods for the caterpillar, the larval stage of the butterfly.

The caterpillar eats voraciously for 9-14 days in order to grow and molt 5 times before its attaches to a host plant where the pupa skin hardens to form the enclosure where metamorphosis takes place.

Host plants to include in pots and beds this summer are parsley, dill, fennel, and passion vine. However, the most important host plant to include is *Asclepias* or milkweed, which is absolutely critical to the survival of the monarch butterfly. It's the ONLY plant the monarch larvae eat, and the ONLY plant they will lay their eggs on. As Southeasterners, we must plant milkweed to insure the survival of monarchs which travel from as far away as Canada through Georgia to overwinter in Mexico.

Make your garden monarch/butterfly-friendly by planting butterfly weed, *A. tuberosa*, common milkweed, *A. syriaca*; or swamp milkweed, *A. incarnate*, which can be grown from seed or purchased at nurseries.

Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants* says, "Because life is fueled by the energy captured from the sun by plants, it will be the plants that we use in our gardens that determine what nature will be like 10, 20, and 50 years from now." Make your contribution to the future; plant native milkweed to help ensure the survival of the butterfly.