



## How to help monarch butterflies

Monarch butterflies have been arriving in Texas from their overwintering grounds in Mexico. Monarchs are the state insect of Texas and are known for their migratory habits. Many people want to help monarch populations, but it's important to do it in a way that won't harm them. This comes down to several things:

1. Providing correct resources at the right time of year. Spring populations of monarchs need milkweed to lay eggs to begin the next generation of butterflies. Fall monarch populations need nectar plants to fuel their journey back to Mexico for overwintering.
2. Utilizing NATIVE milkweed and getting rid of and/ or not planting tropical milkweed, *Asclepias curassavica*.
  - a. Texas is a large state with many different ecoregions. It's important to know the ecoregion where you reside and what native milkweed species grow well within your area. You can find information about Texas Ecoregions here <https://tpwd.texas.gov/education/hunter-education/online-course/wildlife-conservation/texas-ecoregions>  
NATIVE milkweed is also important as it dies back in the late summer to fall and is not present when monarchs move back through. You can find information about Texas milkweed here: [https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd\\_rp\\_w7000\\_1803.pdf](https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_rp_w7000_1803.pdf)
  - b. Tropical milkweed is not a Texas native milkweed species, although it is found in many parts of Texas. This is the milkweed that is often sold at nurseries and is easy to grow. Unfortunately, this milkweed does NOT die back in the fall and can grow all year in some parts of Texas. This can lead to a build up of a protozoan parasite *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*- called OE- that can harm monarch butterflies and their migration. For more information on this see this webinar: [https://youtu.be/MmQh90XOmOg?si=-Og\\_6WSK1BQVUAmQ](https://youtu.be/MmQh90XOmOg?si=-Og_6WSK1BQVUAmQ)
3. Planting nectar plants that bloom in the fall to provide energy for monarchs as they pass through Texas into Mexico to overwinter. To bump things to the next level, you can plant spring nectar plants too. Good fall nectar plants are things such as frostweed, Gregg's mistflower, Maximilian sunflower and fall aster. Ideas for spring nectar plants include mealy blue sage, purple coneflower, Texas lantana and prairie verbena. For more information on plants go here:

<https://www.wildflower.org/plants/>

4. Avoid captive breeding and rearing of monarch butterflies. If you want to watch the life cycle, it's best to do it in nature. Bringing eggs, larvae, pupae, or adults indoors can increase parasite loads and diseases, reduce genetic diversity, and decrease fitness of the butterflies (captive bred monarchs have lower migration success).
5. Create plant pathways that have native milkweed for spring migration and nectar plants for fall migration. Pathways should be away from major roadways to avoid monarchs being killed by vehicles. Avoid mowing these areas March through May and August through November to make plants available for monarch migration.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at [ebrown@ag.tamu.edu](mailto:ebrown@ag.tamu.edu).

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