

Monarchs and Milkweeds



Photo by Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game

Good nectar providing plants for adult monarch butterflies

Latin Name	Common Name	Life Span	Flower Color	Plant Form	Bloom Period
<i>Agastache urticifolia</i>	Nettleleaf giant hyssop	Perennial	Purple/red	Forb	June - July
<i>Asclepias speciosa</i>	Showy milkweed	Perennial	Pink	Forb	May - Aug
<i>Asclepias fascicularis</i> *	Narrow-leaved milkweed	Perennial	Pink	Forb	June - Aug
<i>Asclepias incarnata</i> *	Swamp milkweed	Perennial	Pink/purple/white	Forb	July - Sept
<i>Clematis ligusticifolia</i>	Western white clematis	Perennial	White	Vine	May - July
<i>Cleome lutea</i>	Yellow beeplant	Annual	Yellow	Forb	May - June
<i>Cleome serrulata</i>	Rocky Mountain beeplant	Annual	Purple/pink	Forb	July - Sept
<i>Dasiphora fruticosa</i>	Shrubby cinquefoil	Perennial	Yellow	Shrub	May - June
<i>Ericameria and Chrysothamnus spp</i>	Rabbitbrush	Perennial	Yellow	Shrub	Aug - Oct
<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i>	Sulphur-flower buckwheat	Perennial	White/yellow	Forb	July - Sept
<i>Euthamia occidentalis</i>	Western goldenrod	Perennial	Yellow	Forb	Sept - Nov
<i>Gaillardia aristata</i>	Blanketflower	Perennial	Red/yellow	Forb	July - Sept
<i>Helianthus annuus</i>	Common sunflower	Annual	Yellow	Forb	July - Sept
<i>Helianthus nuttallii</i>	Nuttall's sunflower	Perennial	Yellow	Forb	July - Sept
<i>Mertensia ciliata</i>	Tall fringed bluebells	Perennial	Blue	Forb	May - June
<i>Monardella odoratissima</i>	Mountain monardella	Perennial	White/blue/purple	Forb	June - Aug
<i>Penstemon speciosus</i>	Royal penstemon	Perennial	Blue	Forb	July - Aug
<i>Prunus virginiana</i>	Chokecherry	Perennial	White	Shrub/Tree	Apr - May
<i>Rosa woodsii</i>	Woods' rose	Perennial	Pink	Shrub	June - July
<i>Rudbeckia spp.</i>	Coneflower	Perennial	Yellow/green	Forb	June - July
<i>Salix spp.</i>	Willow	Perennial	Yellow/purple	Shrub/Tree	April - July
<i>Salvia dorrii</i>	Purple sage	Perennial	Blue/purple	Shrub	May - June
<i>Solidago spp.</i>	Goldenrod	Perennial	Yellow	Forb	July - Oct
<i>Sphaeralcea spp.</i>	Globemallow	Perennial	Orange	Forb	April - June
<i>Symphotrichum spp.</i>	Aster	Perennial	White/pink/purple	Forb	July - Sept

*these species are toxic to livestock and should be used with caution

This list was developed in collaboration with Xerces Society and is not exhaustive. Please work with your local NRCS Field Office or Plant Material Center to determine the species composition that is best adapted to your area or visit <http://xerces.org/monarch-nectar-plants/>.

USDA, NRCS. 2017. The PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov>, 24 October 2017). National Plant Data Team, Greensboro, NC 27401-4901 USA.



Monarchs and Milkweeds

Beautiful and Disappearing



Monarch butterfly caterpillars feeding on milkweed. (Bottlecap for size)

Monarchs are one of the most iconic butterfly species in North America. In 1992, the monarch became the official Idaho state insect and in 2015 was designated an Idaho Species of Greatest Conservation Need. Unfortunately, monarchs are facing an uncertain future and may someday soon be gone if we don't pitch in to help.

Monarchs, which typically are found in Idaho starting in the late spring through late autumn, have a fascinating and complex life cycle. This life-cycle involves a lengthy migration completed "relay-style" by several generations in a single year. Each year, adult butterflies migrate to Idaho from winter roosts along the California coast to lay their eggs on milkweeds. An adult monarch can lay up to 500 eggs, usually one egg per plant. Once hatched, the caterpillars ingest toxins from their milkweed diet which makes them unpalatable to birds. Their distinctive black,

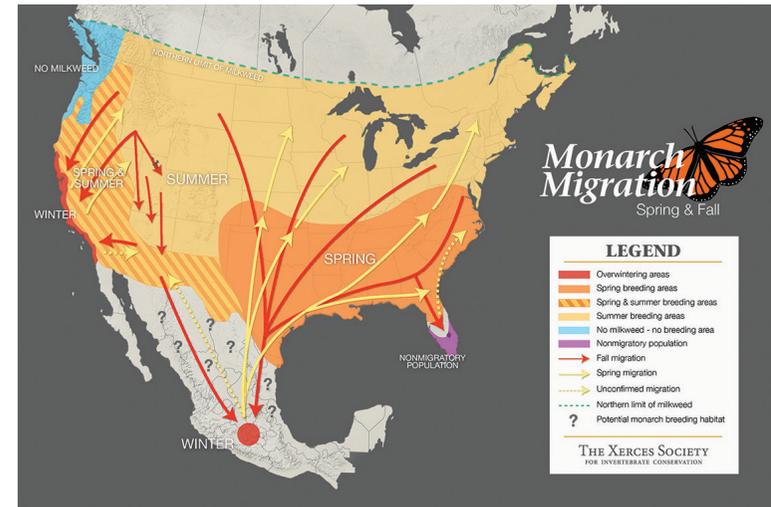
white, and yellow banding serves as warning coloration to would-be predators.

Milkweeds are the sole food source for monarch caterpillars. Without milkweeds, monarchs could not complete their life cycle. At one time, milkweed was classified as a noxious weed due to reported toxic effects on livestock, and efforts were made to eradicate it. There is much unknown about the western monarch population and why it has declined by 74% since the 1990's. Factors that are thought to stress individuals and the general population include pesticides, habitat fragmentation, climate, insecticide use as well as loss of breeding and foraging habitat.

One of the most abundant milkweed species in Idaho is showy milkweed. This beautiful flowering plant is common along ditch banks, roadsides, and in pastures. It is useful to a wide variety of pollinators and beneficial insects. It thrives because livestock typically avoid it due to its bitter taste. Showy milkweed is one of the least toxic of the milkweeds and grazing animals will avoid it if other forage is available.

To help monarchs, the Natural Resources Conservation Service would like to encourage milkweed stands. Start by reducing the use of herbicides and insecticides in, or around, known and potential monarch habitat. Reducing competition from other plants is also helpful. Milkweeds like sunny locations, and timely grazing to reduce competition from grasses can open up space and encourage milkweeds to spread. Burning milkweed stands before or after the butterflies arrive in Idaho will reduce vegetative competition and stimulate more stem and flower production next season.

Showy milkweed can be grown from seed or transplanted from the rhizomatous root. Seed can be sown either directly into well-prepared weed-free soil, or into



containers for later transplanting. Showy milkweed produces a large rhizome that may branch to produce multiple plants. These rhizomes can be dug up in early spring before new shoots emerge, and transplanted. Look for old skeletons from last year's plants and dig as deep as possible.

Planting nectar-producing flowers, in addition to, and near milkweed is beneficial to the adult portion of the monarch's life cycle. Adult monarchs use their long, straw-like tongue, or proboscis, to suck nectar from flowers for nourishment. The nectar provides them with the energy to produce and lay eggs and fuels their migration to and from overwintering areas.

Monarchs are a beautiful part of Idaho's natural heritage. It's up to us as stewards of the landscape to make sure they have what they need to thrive. Contact your local NRCS field office for assistance with monarch habitat or other conservation needs.



Monarch habitat.

Photo by Mace Vaughan, Xerces Society

