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MONARCH

BUTTERFLY GARDENS SPRING UP IN LAKE AREA

BY SUSAN CROCE KELLY

Imagine this:

You have just flown hundreds of miles. You are exhausted and hungry. You head for the place you stayed last year, only to discover that it's gone, and a new housing subdivision has been built in its place. **What to do?**

As you wander forlornly among the buildings, you accidentally come across a small patch of green — a garden! With flowers in bloom! Immediately you land on one, reach in and drink deeply of the rich nectar inside. Then you notice at the edge of the garden are some weedy looking plants with flat leaves and pink flowers. You're saved!

ABOVE RIGHT: Milkweed plants are, after all, weeds, says Ralph Duval, so he plants them on edges and outside Village of Four Seasons gardens. Note these plants, which are outside the fence "to keep kids away," and under bird netting "to keep deer away." Hopefully, they will be in full bloom and readily available when the Monarchs arrive. PHOTO BY SUSAN KIRKPATRICK



MADNESS

▶▶▶ ANYTHING MY GROUP CAN DO?

Missouri's Adopt-A-Highway program offers a Grow Native! option to encourage planting Missouri wildflowers and grasses, which are good pollinator habitats. MoDOT supplies signs, safety vests, caution flags, safety video and safety tops for working along roadsides and will work with volunteers to determine mowing schedules that promote pollinators. Volunteers supply plants and labor and agree to maintain the plantings.

Contact MoDOT's senior roadside manager, Stacy Armstrong, for more information stacy.armstrong@modot.mo.gov.

If you're a Monarch butterfly, this scene is being played out more and more. For years, the population of America's most iconic insect has been dropping, in large part, because the plants they need to survive and the milkweed plants where they lay their eggs have been replaced by buildings, roads, and denser farming practices.

In the past few years, however, these magnificent orange and black butterflies have attracted followers of their own. The Lake area is part of a nationwide movement to save the Monarchs by planting pollinator gardens where they can feed, and planting milkweed where they lay their eggs. The milkweed then becomes a food source for the hatching larve, fueling their growth into pupae and eventual emergence into full-grown butterflies.

The story of the Monarchs is fascinating. The ones we see in the area in late summer and fall overwinter in Mexico on a mountain not far from Mexico City. Every March, the butterflies, which number in the millions, fly north into Texas and other southern states, breeding along the way. Then the next generations of butterflies fly farther north in May and June to the northern states and Canada where two or three more generations are produced before they turn southward. Around mid-August, millions of northern Monarchs begin to migrate south, ultimately to spend the winter in Mexico, breed and begin the cycle all over again. (No, nobody knows how those descendants of the Mexican Monarchs know how to find their way back to the same mountain habitat the next year.)

Private gardens abound in the three-county

LEFT: Osage Beach City Park's Monarch butterfly way station earlier this summer.

PHOTO BY SUSAN KIRKPATRICK



area, but if you pay attention you'll also find a host of public Monarch gardens on the grounds of local schools, in parks, even along the roadsides. Most of these are collaborations by garden clubs, Master Gardener organizations, and the work of Master Naturalists.

So intense is the interest in saving the Monarchs that Missourians have organized into a semi-formal network to share information and knowledge about plants and plantings. Village of the Four Seasons resident Glenn Commons has become a regional coordinator for Missourians for Monarchs. In that capacity, Commons gives talks and works with Master Naturalist chapters, Master Gardener clubs and Federated Garden clubs in 14 counties – “26 garden clubs and three Master Naturalist chapters,” he says.

Commons waxes enthusiastic about butterflies, plant lists, and mostly the numbers of people and organizations who share his passion for saving the Monarchs, and he's quick to tick off places around the lake with way stations for passing butterflies.

“The Osage Beach City Park has expanded their Monarch garden this year,” he says, “and there's one at the Hillbilly Fairground in Laurie. The Warsaw Garden Club has planted 1,200 square feet of butterfly habitat on US Army Corps of Engineers property near the Lake. Master Gardeners are also planting one at Willmore Lodge near Bagnell Dam. I tell them all to put up signs, don't mow and don't use pesticides in those areas.”

Commons is also working with the Lodge of the Four Seasons to develop a butterfly habitat along its lakefront. “The Lodge wants to be seen as a conservation-focused resort,” he says. “That will offer education opportunities for visitors.”

Master Gardener Ralph Duval has been planting milkweed on the edges of various Four Seasons' community parks. One plot is on the outside of a chain link fence around a playground, “to keep the kids away,” and under bird netting, “to keep the deer away.” At 177 plants in the ground by mid-summer, “It's a start,” he says.

Jo Ann Billington of Gravois Mills, who is both a Master Gardener and Master Naturalist, is involved in several Monarch





Ralph Duval, left, and Guy Adams of the Village of Four Seasons, inspect a flat of milkweed plants. Milkweed is the only place Monarch butterflies will lay eggs, and the only thing that the hungry caterpillars will eat. PHOTO BY SUSAN KIRKPATRICK

projects, including a pollinator plot planted by the Ozark Prairie Master Gardeners in the Versailles City Garden, and the Master Naturalists-initiated Monarch garden in the Hillbilly Fairgrounds at Laurie.

What's the difference between a pollinator plot and a Monarch garden? "All butterflies and other pollinator insects like flowers, but Monarchs lay eggs only on milkweed plants as those are the only leaves that the emerging caterpillars can eat, so you can have a pollinator garden, but if it doesn't have milkweed plants it's not really a milkweed garden.

It doesn't take much space for a Monarch garden. Experts at the St. Louis Botanical Garden suggest a sunny location about 3 x 3 is plenty big with one of each of the following plants: purple coneflowers, goldenrod (if you aren't allergic), Black-Eyed Susans, butterfly weed (a type of milkweed), New England Asters, bee balm/bergamot, whorled milkweed, swamp/marsh milkweed and common milkweed.

▶▶▶ **MORE ON PLANTS**

Where to get Milkweed plants and seeds:

GIFTED GARDENS, CAMDENTON
www.giftedgardens.org

MISSOURI WILDFLOWER NURSERY, JEFFERSON CITY
www.mowildflowers.net

▶▶▶ **MORE ON MONARCHS**

www.grownative.org
www.monarchwatch.org
www.lakeozarkmasternaturalists.com

MONARCH MIGRATION MAP
www.learner.org/jnorth/maps/monarch.html

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