

# The Butterfly Connection

## Newsletter

March-April 2019

### Spring is for Butterflies

Spring has sprung in Arizona!

When the temperatures get up to the 80's for more than a few days, we know Spring is here. This usually happens before the Spring Equinox on March 20th. This issue's focus is on how to bring the butterflies to you or where you can go see them.

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#### Important Dates

Desert Botanical Gardens, Phoenix  
Spring Butterfly Exhibit  
1201 N. Galvin Parkway,  
Phoenix, AZ 85008  
From March 2 to May 12, 9:30-5:00  
Adults \$24.95 Children \$12.95 (3-17)  
Garden Members & under 3 are free

More Information:  
Call 480-941-1225



# Spring is for Butterflies

From: <https://texasbutterflyranch.com/2019/01/17/monarch-butterfly-population-up-in-mexico-down-in-california/>



## Monarch butterfly population up in Mexico, down in California

Monarchs are more admired than any other butterfly because of its strength and stamina during their migration journey. This year's migration brings some good news and some bad news.

When it comes to the 2019 monarch butterfly population, the numbers suggest catastrophe in California and a rebound in Mexico. On the west coast, the news is dismal. The western population of monarch butterflies, which travel up and down the California coast, hit a historic low this year according to a study by the Xerces Society.

The group's most recent count over Thanksgiving weekend recorded less than 30,000 butterflies—an 86 percent decline since 2017 alone. Emma Pelton, the Xerces biologist who oversaw the study, called the findings “potentially catastrophic” and a “wake-up call.”

“Extinction looks increasingly likely,” a January 6 story in the San Francisco Chronicle claimed. “The monarchs’ flight seems more perilous than ever,” said the New York Times in a January 9 piece headlined California’s Monarch Butterfly Population Hits Record Low.

Wildfires, deforestation, climate change, pesticide abuse, and poor land management have all conspired in recent years to quicken the pace of monarch butterfly decline in California and elsewhere. Even so, most monarch scientists don't believe monarchs will become extinct.

“The migration won't last forever. The monarchs will,” said migration expert Andy Davis, Assistant Research Scientist at the Odum School of Ecology at the The University of Georgia and editor of the journal, Animal Migration. “The monarchs will adapt just like they have in every other population around the world,” he said.

Davis recently shared news of several recent studies on monarchs on his educational MonarchScience blog, including one by Hannah Vander Zanden, an assistant professor at the University of Florida. Her research showed in a small sample that almost 40% of monarchs in Florida have migrated from the Midwest or elsewhere.

The Vander Zanden paper, “Alternate migration strategies of eastern monarch butterflies revealed by stable isotopes,” seems to upend what we thought we knew about the fall migration of eastern monarchs, wrote Davis. “We've always assumed that the winter destination of the eastern breeding population is the mountains of Central Mexico, but what if it isn't? What if they don't ALL travel to Mexico...what if over time, greater and greater numbers of monarchs are choosing to travel to these ‘alternate’ winter destinations, like South Florida? Wouldn't that mean the Mexican overwintering colonies would slowly decline in size?”

Perhaps, but not this year. The 2019 crop of monarch butterflies that roost in Mexico appears to be having its best year in a decade. Karen Oberhauser, cofounder of Monarch Joint Venture and Director of the Arboretum at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, said this year's eastern monarchs experienced a “perfect storm of conditions.” Chip Taylor of Monarch Watch agreed. “We've had a set of dynamics in the east that were really, really good,” said Taylor. It's still early in the season, and a freak freeze or catastrophic climate event could change everything, but monarch butterfly followers are hopeful of a huge rebound in the eastern migratory population this year. The official count won't be released for several weeks, yet every indicator suggests the numbers of monarchs at the roosting sites in 2019 will be one of the biggest in a decade.



# Start Your Garden Yet?



What is it about having a garden that makes us think about butterflies? That may not be the case for everyone but it is for this butterfly advocate. I remember while growing up in central Minnesota my mom couldn't wait until the cold weather was gone so she could get out in her garden. I don't share that love with her but I do share her love of butterflies. I don't have a green thumb like she did. My thumbs are all different colors but I guess that's the artist in me. I love to create things that are many vibrant colors. Can you tell? I guess that's why I love butterflies too because of all their array of colors.

So have you started planting your garden yet? Of course, if you live in the colder part of the country, it may take some more time. However, you can start like my mom used to do. She would plant the seeds in little boxes and then by the time it was warm enough, they would have sprouted and could be transplanted right into the garden. I found a great video on Youtube on "How to prepare for the garden growing season" that shows how to plant and grow seeds in your garage while it's still in the 50s outside. The man that made this video said he used what he had on hand and didn't need to purchase anything but then some people keep lots of stuff in their garage. One thing I found important you may want to invest in is a soil thermometer so you can keep your seedlings at the right temperature.

I also found an article on which vegetables are best for early planting on a website called GrowVeg.com. They recommend five that are good to start early—leaf lettuce, sweet alyssum, bulb onions, seed-sown shallots, and kale. So with a little research and well spent time, you can get a jump start on your garden.

What if you have never tried growing a garden? There is no reason not to start with a mini-garden. I can be grown in the back yard or even on a patio. Think of vegetables that you like and eat a lot of such as in salads. Some of the easiest veggies to grow are carrots, onions, lettuce, tomatoes and radishes. Here are some simple steps to follow to start your own mini-garden typically between mid-April and mid-May:

1. Plan out the layout of your garden by knowing how much room each plant needs.
2. Prepare the soil by tilling or using a shovel to turn it. Add fertilizer to make sure the soil is good.
3. Plant seeds by sticking your finger into soil down to the second joint, sprinkle a little fertilizer, place seed inside and cover.
4. Water well until soil is moist but not over-watered.
5. Protect plants with a net from animals, birds and insects.
6. Watch the garden as it will take a few weeks to germinate. Water in the morning and if extra hot, water more than once. Sprinkle fertilizer every 3-4 weeks.
7. Before you know it, you will be digging up or picking veggies and eating them.
8. ENJOY! Next time, add more variety.



# How You Can Help



## Plant Milkweeds Now

I am repeating last month's article due to the importance of it. Monarchs need our help to survive and we will be helping ourselves by helping them. One way that you can help the monarchs is to plant milkweeds in your flower garden now. If you plant the perennials now, they may be big enough in the spring to be of help to the female monarchs laying eggs. But what if you live in the city and don't have a garden? You can still help.

According to the Keller Science Action Center, it is becoming recognized that cities as well as the countryside can be helpful to the monarch's survival. This is exceptional news since 4 out of 5 Americans live in cities. For example, Chicago has put forth innovative efforts in order to plant 1 million stems of milkweed throughout the city and anticipate to increase that number to over 38 million in the next few years.

The word is getting out that anyone can help and many people are taking part, including milkweed and other native flowers that provide nectar for the butterfly throughout the growing season. They can be planted in home gardens and in natural areas around schools, offices, parks, or anywhere there is a patch of open land—even on inner city patios.



**Warning:** Milkweed plants are poisonous to animals other than monarchs so do not plant them anywhere that your pet can get to, especially if they like to chew plants. If you grow anywhere that your pets can get to, be sure to put some type of fencing around plants to keep out the pets. The toxicity of the plant is what helps protect the Monarchs from predators as they do not like the taste of the caterpillars or butterflies.

Also, milkweeds get the "milk" in their name from the milky latex that oozes out when a leaf or stem is broken. This "milk" can cause severe eye problems if it gets in an eye from rubbing it after touching the milk. Be certain to wash your hands thoroughly after handling them.

## Butterfly Garden in 7 Steps

You can begin a garden in a plot of land like a backyard or add a few plants to a window box or pots on the patio. Growing a garden of any type takes patience and a watchful eye so having a butterfly garden close by to where you can see it out of your window or right outside the door is a good idea.

Pick a sunny area which has some protection from wind like some trees or shrubs. Since butterflies love to soak up the sun, find some big rocks you can place throughout the garden or next to the box or pots for them to land on and rest. Placing something like a bowl or birdbath to keep water in is also a good way to attract butterflies.

You will need standard garden tools, planting soil or extra dirt and mulch. You may want to get an idea of what you want your garden to look like from websites.

The seven steps to making your butterfly garden in the country or city are as follows:

1. Research what type of butterflies come to your area and the nectar-producing flowers they prefer as well as what type of milkweed host plants you will want to plant. One place to look is at <http://www.gardenswithwings.com/> which gives you a list of plants by your zip code.
2. If you're using the land's soil, get it analyzed to see if it's compatible with the plants planned. If the ground's soil isn't satisfactory, obtain supplies to build a raised bed, planter box or enough planting pots to hold the amount of plants or seeds you are planning that can be filled with soil purchased at nursery or garden store.
3. If you're using the land's soil, prepare soil of ground by turning it by raking and adding more fresh soil.
4. Obtain plants from local nursery that have not been treated with pesticides. Planting perennials that will grow back every year are less work. Not all milkweeds are perennials but those that are have a wide variety of different colors. Some will grow best in certain areas. Go to <https://blog.nwf.org/2015/02/twelve-native-milkweeds-for-monarchs/> to find what states they grow in, their growing conditions, how big they will get, and more.
5. If using seeds, choose those you can plant in the spring or fall so they have time to germinate. You can also purchase small plants already starting to grow at a nursery.
6. Planting is the fun part – plant rooted plants in holes just big enough for the roots, cover and pack with dirt or straw mulch to cut down on weeds. Plant seeds according to directions but try to put them in bunches so that the colors will be more easily seen by butterflies. Cover with a layer of dirt as instructed on package.
7. The 4 W's – Watch, Wait, Water, and Weed: Water generously every day or according to the instructions on seed packages. Once the plants start growing, continue to water regularly and pull any weeds as soon as possible. Keep water or wet moist soil exposed for the monarchs to drink.





# Kid's Activity Page



## Make Butterfly Puppets

For younger ones ages 4-8. Be creative and come up with designs that look anything like these. Cut out from felt the wings in different colors. Add sequins, buttons, glitter, beads and whatever you have to glue to the wings. Cut out the body and glue together on each side to make an opening for your finger. Glue eyes and mouth to face and add Q-tips or pipe cleaners as antennae. Let glue dry. Have fun playing puppets!



## Folded Paper Butterfly Garland

### Materials:

- 10 colored papers (or as many as you want) 6" x 6" pre-made such as wrapping paper or cut out pieces and color them different multi-colors
- 5 pipe cleaners (or as many needed for each pair of sheets) of various colors to match or not—6" long
- String, ribbon, yarn or twine to hang them on
- Scissors

### Directions:

1. Color papers if needed
2. Fold paper in half diagonally to make a triangle
3. Working from center line out make zig zag folds about 1/2" apart, one half then the other
4. Repeat with 2 & 3 on second sheet
5. Pinch together in center
6. Wrap firmly in center with pipe cleaner and twist to secure, bend pipe cleaner to resemble antennae
7. Thread twine/ribbon through center of butterfly bodies to hang

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# Butterfly Tips



## Don't Miss the Butterfly Exhibit at the Desert Botanical Gardens

Many major cities have their own Botanical Gardens but how many have a Desert Botanical Garden? Phoenix, Arizona is one of the few in the USA. You may be surprised at how beautiful the desert can be when in bloom as shown here.



What makes them even more beautiful is the butterflies that live there. Monarch butterflies and their insect friends return to the Garden's Butterfly Exhibit. Hundreds of Southwestern butterflies are fluttering back to Desert Botanical Garden with the opening of the seasonal butterfly pavilion. Visit the Spring Butterfly Exhibit from March 2 to May 12 to take a closer look at pollinators and predator insects that care for and protect our desert.

The Garden's Butterfly Pavilion works to educate patrons about all the life stages of butterflies, as well as the Garden's work to protect them. Each week, hundreds of new butterflies are released in the pavilion, and new pupae are added to the caterpillar nursery.

Wishing You Many Butterfly Blessings!

Jessica Dumas  
The Butterfly Connection

