

## About Monarchs

The monarch butterfly is known for its beauty and popularity. Its vibrant orange wings are a pleasure to see on a spring day.

Milkweed is very important because it creates a home and food for them. Find out how you can help Monarchs by reading further about these butterflies.

## Decline In Monarch Population

In the last ten years there has been a heavy decline in the monarch butterfly population. The threat to the monarch population has greatly worried environmentalist and researchers. The butterflies are disappearing in part due to a decline of their homes, specifically the loss of milkweed, the only plant upon which they lay eggs and their larvae feed

## How You Can Help

Help bring back the monarch! There is one easy way you can help monarch butterflies. Planting milkweed in your home garden will provide homes for the monarch and with monarch butterflies around, your garden will be filled with orange beauty!

## Migration Patterns

Monarch butterflies cannot live in freezing temperatures that North and Central America have in the fall and winter. Butterflies fly South for winter and come back to the north parts of America in the spring when plants are blooming.

## Milkweed

The Monarch Butterfly's diet is made up of nectar, water, fruit juice, and milkweed. Milkweed is a poisonous plant to most plant eaters but not to these butterflies. Monarch caterpillars can store the poison in their bodies, making them a nasty tasting snack to potential predators. Milkweed is also very important to butterflies because it is the only place butterflies will lay their eggs.

# MONARCH BUTTERFLIES



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## The Developmental Stages



**EGG (3-4 days)**

Monarch butterflies usually lay one egg on the underside of a milkweed leaf. The butterfly chooses a leaf close to the top of the plant to keep the egg safe. She can lay about 100-300 eggs in her lifetime. The caterpillar hatches from the egg about four days after being laid.



**CATERPILLAR (10-14 days)**

The caterpillar chews its way out of its eggshell, then it eats the eggshell. It then turns to the milkweed leaf itself, chewing larger and larger holes as it grows. It sheds and grows new skin; like a new pair of clothes. When this happens, it is called an instar. The caterpillar experiences an instar five times.



**CHRYSALIS (10-14 days)**

When the caterpillar is ready to form into a butterfly it finds a place to hang upside down. It will shed for the last time, magically transforming into a chrysalis in less than five minutes. The chrysalis stays well camouflaged to protect itself. The caterpillar begins to form into a butterfly on the inside. After two weeks the butterfly hatches out of the chrysalis.



**BUTTERFLY** During the butterfly's adult stage it searches for a mate. After the female meets her first mate she begins laying her eggs. Monarchs mate several times in their lives.

## How to Care for your butterfly

Would you like to see a monarch caterpillar hatch from an egg and later form a chrysalis and turn into a beautiful butterfly? Here's how!

First you must find a monarch egg. The only place to find an egg is on the underside of a milkweed leaf. The egg is a clear football shaped bubble that is about half the size of a grain of rice. Carefully break off the leaf at the base.

Next get two clear cups that are at least 12oz and one lid with a straw hole. Fill one of the cups with water; just enough to cover the bottom. In the second cup, punch a pencil-sized hole in the bottom. Put the stem of the leaf inside the dry cup with the stem sticking through the hole you made. Then place the dry cup inside the cup with water so the stem touches the water. Then place the cap on and you've created a happy home where the leaf can survive and the caterpillar stays dry.

The tip of the egg will turn black the day the caterpillar will hatch. Once it hatches it will eat so the leaf must be replaced when it gets too dry or chewed up. Make sure to clean the cup whenever it gets too dirty and make sure the cup stays dry. Every time the caterpillar sheds its skin it will rest so don't worry if it seems a little sluggish at times.

After 15 days the caterpillar will crawl to the ceiling of the cup (the cap), spin webbing to attach its feet, and hang upside down in a "J" form for about 8 hours. In the last three minutes the "J" will turn into an "I" and quickly form a chrysalis. Once it is in the chrysalis, move the cap, with the chrysalis still hanging on it, into a container with plenty of wing space and good airflow. About 10 days later the chrysalis will turn from green to brown and the butterfly will hatch within a day. After it emerges it will stretch its wings. Once it can fly, you should let it go on a sunny day.

Ask the Nature center about getting your butterfly a sticker!

Raising Monarch Butterflies: Monarch Butterfly Nannies and Sprits.

Presenters: Sean Shaffer, Liza Fischel & Jessy Zich

Wild Things Conference 2015 Resource list

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University of Minnesota, Monarch Lab

<http://monarchlab.org/education-and-gardening/curricula>

University of Kansas, Monarch Watch

<http://www.monarchwatch.org/>

Journey North

<http://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch/>