

Monarch Butterflies and Horsetail Milkweed

Article and Photos by Coya Steele Silverlake – July 2016

Watters Garden Center has MILKWEED! If you're looking for the best Monarch attractor around – it's Horsetail Milkweed, native to Arizona and the Monarchs' favorite variety for egg-laying. Horsetail, AKA "Whorled" or *Asclepias subverticillata* is also very easy to grow. As many of you know, milkweed is the only family of plants the Monarch butterfly lays its eggs on. This plant also attracts other pollinators to its flowers – you will see many buzzing critters in your garden going for the nectar. The milky-white flower clusters have a wonderful, sweet scent!



- Horsetail Milkweed Flowers with Honeybee -

The Butterflies

Here's a bit of info about Monarchs, Queen Butterflies and our state butterfly, the Two-tailed Swallowtail:

Adult Monarchs are orange with a black body, black veins and white dots on the black. The males have an enlarged area on a vein of the secondary or hind wings. (It's the vein that comes off the back of what looks like a mitt or "hand".) These are their pheromone pockets. The females do not have the pocket.



- Male Monarch Butterfly -



- Female Monarch Butterfly with Tag -

The Monarchs in these photos were found as caterpillars on Horsetail Milkweed in Prescott Valley in the fall of 2015 and raised indoors. They were tagged after emerging from their chrysalids and released immediately.



- Queen Butterflies Mating -

The Queens look very similar to Monarchs and are often mistaken for them. However, you can tell the difference by looking closely. If you see white dots within the orange areas – you know it’s a Queen. In this photo where two Queens are mating, the male is above the female and is smaller. You can also see white “dusting” around the black veins on the male. Its pheromone pockets look like little bull’s eyes with black around the white. Aren’t these butterflies beautiful? Photo taken in PV.

Our Two-tailed Swallowtail is a very large butterfly and is mostly yellow. It is often mistaken for a Monarch – but once you’ve identified all these butterflies a few times you’ll become proficient at seeing the differences quickly.



- Two-tailed Swallowtail Butterfly – Arizona State Butterfly -

It's always good to photograph butterflies to get better at identifying them! SW Monarch Study appreciates receiving photos – especially Monarchs! Find them on Facebook. Now is a good time to request Monarch tags through SW Monarch Study. As we will start to see the Monarchs appear in Yavapai County in July with the Monsoons on their migration north, the preponderance of adult butterflies will appear in Sept. & Oct. on their return journey. Many eggs will be laid during this time and the butterflies that hatch will head southward as the cold starts to set in. (See tagged Monarch above.) Photo taken at Yavapai College, Prescott.

If you came to our “Arizona Monarch Migration” presentation at Watters last August I mentioned that Monarch Waystation signs are available through MonarchWatch.org for your own garden. We do want to continue to support bringing back the Monarch populations and helping them on their journeys as they move through our state! As those who pass by your Monarch and pollinator garden see the sign, they'll be drawn to get a closer look at your beautiful handiwork... and maybe see a butterfly or two!

Horsetail Milkweed

A little more about Horsetail Milkweed – Once you've purchased your plants it's best to get them in the ground as soon as possible. Try to keep the roots intact while transplanting. Even though they're technically "weeds" they have rather particular requirements for their roots; the less disturbed the better. Choose an area that's well-draining; possibly a spot at the edge of your yard that has a rise to it. These plants love native soil and grow best in it. Keep watered well until established. They're very draught-tolerant after they "set". The roots will start to branch out underground to shoot up new plants. It may take until next spring to begin to see these "babies" – but let me tell you – they will come! So, make sure you've given your new milkweed plants room to grow their family. The new shoots will appear around eight to 12 inches from the parent plant.

Watters also sells Horsetail Milkweed seeds. They're locally harvested so you know you're getting the result of generations of an indigenous lineage. Great genes! These seeds need to be "vernalized" for 30 days before planting – however, if you plant them directly into the ground in late summer or fall nature will do her job and most likely you'll see the seedlings sprouting up in the spring. I have had my best luck with this method! AND FYI – be sure to harvest the seeds from your own plants; best to get them just as the pods start to open. This way you know they're mature.

Be sure to check-out Wing Nut Productions Nature Photo Cards at the check-out at Watters. You'll see lots of Monarch shots, like the ones above, other butterflies and plenty of flowers and critters!

EXTRAS –

Here's a bit on the Monarch's life cycle from Monarch Butterfly USA:

<http://www.monarchbutterflyusa.com/Cycle.htm>

The total time frame for one butterfly's life cycle (one generation) is about 6-8 weeks . . . egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, butterfly. It grows inside the egg for about 4 days. It then munches milkweed and grows as a monarch caterpillar (larvae) for about 2 more weeks. The caterpillar's life inside the chrysalis (pupa) lasts about 10 days and its wonderful life as an adult butterfly lasts from 2 - 6 weeks.

February/March - hibernating monarchs in Mexico and southern California reawaken, become active, find a mate, begin the flight

Northward and lay their eggs. Finally they die. These special monarchs have lived about 4-5 months through the long winter.

March/April -the 1st generation monarchs are born -egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, adult butterfly;

May/June - the 2nd generation is born - egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, adult butterfly;

July/August - the 3rd generation is born - egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, adult butterfly;

Sept/Oct - the 4th generation is born - egg, caterpillar, chrysalis, adult butterfly . . . but THIS generation does not die. It MIGRATES south and lives 6-8 months in Mexico or Southern California. They begin awakening and mating in February/March of the NEXT SPRING, and then lay their eggs! Withered and tattered from their migration and hibernation . . . they finally die.

Sites of interest:

[Monarch Watch](http://www.monarchwatch.org/) - www.monarchwatch.org/

[Southwest Monarch Study](http://www.swmonarchs.org) - www.swmonarchs.org

Also Search on Facebook

[The Monarch Joint Venture: Home](http://www.monarchjointventure.org) - www.monarchjointventure.org

[Save Monarch Butterflies - Get free milkweed seeds to plant](http://www.saveourmonarchs.org)

[www.saveourmonarchs.org/](http://www.saveourmonarchs.org) **Help** us bring them back!

[Monarch Butterfly Site: Life Cycle, Migration, Pictures, News, More!](http://www.monarch-butterfly.com/)

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