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Celebrating natives  
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## Monarch Matters

By Candy Sarikonda

It's fall, and the monarch migration is underway. You can help save the monarch migration by planting milkweed and fall nectar plants. What do I mean by, "Save the Monarch Migration?" Most monarch scientists believe it is unlikely that monarch butterflies will become extinct. Scientists are, however, very concerned that the migration will become so small that it will be almost unnoticeable--no rivers of monarchs migrating through Texas and along the East coast, painfully few monarchs overwintering in Mexico. Those amazing images of thousands of monarchs overwintering at one California site may be gone forever. More recently, some scientists and monarch enthusiasts are starting to get worried, as never before. How low of a population is too low, they are asking? At what point will the population be so low that monarchs cannot recover? Will people begin to forget about monarchs, when monarchs are no longer regularly seen in their backyards?

Show your friends and neighbors that you care. Certify your butterfly garden and cast your vote for monarch conservation. Plant milkweed, and fall-blooming nectar plants. Fall is a critical time for monarchs. Monarchs actually need to gain weight as they migrate south to Mexico for the winter. Monarchs survive the winter by living off fat stored in their abdomens. There are few nectar sources in the monarchs' winter home, certainly not enough to feed millions of butterflies throughout the winter! So monarchs must feed heavily on nectar plants as they migrate south, building their fat reserves. This gain in lipid mass is illustrated in the Lipid Mass slide at the Journey North link, [http://www.learner.org/jnorth/images/graphics/monarch/LipidMass\\_Month.html](http://www.learner.org/jnorth/images/graphics/monarch/LipidMass_Month.html) with an accompanying audio explanation provided by Dr. Chip Taylor at [http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/monarch/nectar\\_lipid\\_graph.html](http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/monarch/nectar_lipid_graph.html) Clearly, fall nectar sources are critical to the fall migration and successful overwintering of the monarch butterflies. Fall-blooming plants such as asters and goldenrods can easily be added to an existing garden, or a new garden can be created to help sustain the migration. See the Wild for Monarchs brochure for a list of plants that would be perfect for your butterfly garden <http://www.wildones.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Wild-For-Monarchs-Brochure.pdf>

Fall is an ideal time for planting. If you have milkweeds to share, or plants needing to be rescued, fall is a great time to transplant milkweeds.



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Milkweeds such as butterflyweed (*A. tuberosa*), swamp milkweed (*A. incarnate*) and common milkweed (*A. syriaca*) can be transplanted in the fall, after they are done producing seed and have begun to senesce (die back) for the winter.

Swamp milkweed is probably the easiest milkweed species to transplant. The roots of swamp milkweed form a ball, similar in appearance to the head of an old-fashioned mop. Dig 1-2 feet deep and 1-2 feet wide around the base of the plant, depending on its size. A good rule of thumb is to dig as wide as the crown of the plant is wide. Always, water your plants before digging them up—this will help the soil adhere to the roots, and give the plant a thorough drink before disturbing its root system. After digging up the plant, place it in a pot, bag or a bucket of water in a part shade area for a few days. This will help the plant overcome transplant stress. If you must plant it in its new home immediately, you can do so, but keep the plant well-watered for a few weeks. Choose an early morning or cloudy day to do your transplanting, to protect your new transplants from the harsh sun.

Butterflyweed is a bit more tricky to transplant. Butterflyweed transplants best in late fall or very early spring. This milkweed species has a deep taproot that is thick and knobby, reminiscent of a carrot. Again, it is important to water the plant before digging it up. Dig deep, usually 2-3 feet deep and 2-3 feet wide around the base of the plant. Place the plant in a pot, or move it to its new home immediately. You can place the transplant in a bag, but often sandy soil will fall from the roots or the taproot will break—using a pot will work best. Make sure to plant the milkweed at the same depth it was previously, to avoid rotting the

taproot or exposing too much of the taproot to winter heaving. Be certain to place the plant in a site with well-drained soil, and keep it watered well for a few weeks to help it through the transplant stress.

Common milkweed can also be transplanted, but it has a very deep taproot. You will need to dig 2-3 feet deep, and 1-2 feet wide. Make sure you dig up a section of the root that includes the horizontal rhizome. The rhizome is the horizontal root that runs out like a tendril from the stalk, or ramet. When you dig up the ramet, you will need to cut the rhizome with your shovel blade, leaving a portion of the rhizome still attached on either side of the ramet. Essentially, you will be digging up a section of the root system that will look like an upside-down "T." Digging up a "T" section of the root system will greatly increase your transplant success. After digging up the plant, place it in a pot and move it to its new home. Keep it watered well for a few weeks to help it through the transplant stress.

Milkweeds can be transplanted in early spring as well. Follow the same steps as described previously, but dig the plants up shortly after they break ground, when they are about 2-6 inches tall. Try to avoid digging them up once they are more than 6 inches tall, since they will likely suffer from transplant stress and not survive. Never dig up plants when they are blooming or going to seed, doing so will cause significant transplant stress and may kill the plant. Do not dig plants from the wild, and always get permission from the property owner if it is not your property! Finally, keep your transplanted milkweeds watered regularly for the first year, and then leave them on their own. They are native, after all!