

Tech Note

Native Wildflowers (Not Just Milkweeds) Are Key for Monarchs

By RosaLee Walker, Private Lands Biologist



While planting or preserving milkweeds has long been advertised as a way to help monarch butterflies, this strategy only focuses

on one lifecycle of the well-known butterfly – the caterpillar. Monarch caterpillars feed almost exclusively on milkweed; in Oklahoma green antelopehorn milkweed is the most commonly used host plant. But the adult butterflies visit a wider variety of wildflowers in their nearly constant search for nectar. Because of this, landowners interested in helping monarchs along their journey can make sure both wildflowers and milkweeds are available for these long-distance migrants.

Increasing wildflowers and milkweeds can be as simple as reducing the amount of herbicides used to remove undesirable “weeds,” or planting wildflower seeds. Many commercially available mixes are packed with excellent nectar-producing plants. Other practices, such as prescribed



In Oklahoma, maintaining large patches of native wildflowers can help migrating monarchs, especially in the fall.

burning, light grazing, and timber thinning, are also great ways to promote milkweeds and other native wildflowers.

Landowners interested in managing for monarchs can always contact the Wildlife Department’s private lands biologists for free technical assistance. Resources are also available at www.monarchjointventure.org.

Whether traveling through Oklahoma during the spring or fall, monarch butterflies are in search of two primary things – plenty of milkweeds and plenty of wildflowers. Without them, few, if any, monarchs are likely to be seen. However, Oklahomans managing for an abundance of both are in for a treat each year when these fascinating insects pass through.



Oklahoma's Native Nectar Plants	Oklahoma's Native Milkweeds
False Indigo	Antelopehorn Milkweed
Engelmann Daisy	Tall Green Milkweed
Indian Blanket	Common Milkweed
Blazing Star	Swamp Milkweed
Purple Coneflower	Englemann's Milkweed
Summer Phlox	Clasping Milkweed
Canada Goldenrod	Sand Milkweed

The Annual Migration Requires Multiple Generations

The annual migration of monarch butterflies requires four to five generations of butterflies to traverse and complete the cycle. The first generation begins in the Southern Great Plains and is composed of the offspring of the butterflies that overwintered in central Mexico. These butterflies then move further north to

produce the second and third generations into the central plains and Midwest, eventually making their way into the upper-Midwest and Canada. Beginning in late August and early September, the fourth generation then commences their long trek south to the wintering grounds of central

Mexico. An additional fifth generation, of which limited information is known, are the offspring of fourth generation fall-migrating monarchs that become reproductive as they move through the Southern Great Plains of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.

