How to get involved in monarch conservation



The monarch butterfly is an iconic North American species known for its international migration spanning four to five generations. Protecting this amazing migration takes an all-hands- on-deck approach, and everyone can contribute to monarch conservation through habitat creation, participating in research, financial contributions to conservation groups, or helping spread the word.

The monarch butterfly and its amazing migration

Twice every year, monarch butterflies complete a spectacular journey unlike that of any other North American insect. In the fall, monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains migrate to central Mexico to overwinter and those west of the mountains typically migrate to the California coast.

Starting in the late summer, environmental cues trigger migratory behavior. Monarchs delay reproductive development and begin to travel away from their breeding grounds. After traveling vast distances, these monarchs spend the winter clustered in the Mexican oyamel fir forests or Californian eucalyptus and native pine or cypress trees; these sites provide the perfect microclimate that allows them to survive until the following spring.

Beginning in late winter to early spring, breeding resumes and the same monarchs start the northward migration. Unlike the single fall migratory generation, multiple generations fulfill the northbound migration.





Monarchs require both nectar plants for adults and milkweed for larvae to eat.

Monarch habitat

A continent-wide migration requires a lot of habitat at every step of the migratory journey. Milkweed species are the sole food source for monarch caterpillars, making milkweed an essential habitat component.

Adult monarch butterflies feed on the nectar of many plants, so access to diverse native flowering plants that bloom throughout the growing season is important for fueling their breeding and migration.





Participating in a citizen science project is one way you can help monarchs.

Why care about monarch conservation?

Monarchs make an excellent flagship species for pollinator conservation. Creating habitat for monarchs by planting diverse, native nectar plants and milkweed also creates habitat for other pollinators which we rely on for pollination services in agricultural and natural settings. Conserving pollinators and their habitat has positive cascading effects on the conservation of other animals like songbirds and mammals. This pays dividends towards the health of our natural and managed habitats, paving a future for our own species.

How you can help



Create habitat: The most important action you can take to benefit monarchs and other pollinators is to create or improve habitat that contains native milkweeds and nectar plants. First, protect and improve existing habitat areas with appropriately timed management, like mowing, burning, or grazing, to promote native plant growth. In addition, you might consider adding native plant plugs or re-seeding a smaller area to help improve the diversity and improve the site for monarchs and other pollinators. You may also identify areas that could be transformed into new habitats, like lawns, edges, or other corridors on your property.

Native plantings are not only good for monarchs, but have low long-term maintenance costs and provide other environmental benefits like water filtration and erosion control. Visit www.plantmilkweed.org for recommendations on finding the appropriate plants for your project.

Get involved in citizen science: Participating in citizen science monitoring programs is an excellent way to track monarch use of the habitat you create and contribute to national scientific efforts to monitor monarch population trends. Journey North is a simple, online way to report sightings to track monarch migration and milkweed phenology. Observations are compiled into maps which show spring and fall migration in real-time. Monarch Watch (east of the Rocky Mountains), Monarch Alert (California), and the Southwest Monarch Study (southwest region) operate tagging programs where volunteers put a small, unique tag, or sticker, on butterflies to better understand migration. Project Monarch Health utilizes volunteers to track the prevalence of the protozoan parasite Ophryocystis elektroscirrha (O.E) in monarchs by taking a sticker peel of the butterfly's abdomen – this does not hurt the monarch! Monarch Larva Monitoring Project volunteers establish a milkweed monitoring site and observe it weekly for monarch eggs and caterpillars and do an annual assessment of the milkweed density (additional, optional activities available for this project). These are not all of the monarch citizen science projects out there, either, with additional projects in Canada and Mexico.

Educate others: There are many opportunities for you to educate others about monarchs and advocate for monarch conservation. Provide your community with information about what they can do to help monarchs by giving presentations, sharing social media posts, and just talking with people you encounter. If you participate in a citizen science monitoring project, get others involved by training others to collect data at their own site(s). Additionally, placing educational signs or structures in your garden or habitat may inspire passers-by to take part in monarch monitoring or conservation activities of their own.

Contribute financially: Your financial contribution to monarch conservation will help implement a rigorous conservation plan bringing varied strengths, tools, and land management opportunities to the table through the MJV partnership. We are able to make careful and strategic decisions about which next-steps would best advance monarch conservation in the U.S., and allocate our energies and funds accordingly.

Photos: Monarch Joint Venture/Laura Lukens, Wendy Caldwell, Kelly Nail, Katie-Lyn Puffer

MONARCH JOINT VENTURE

Our **mission** is to protect monarchs and their migration by collaborating with partners to deliver habitat conservation, education, and science across the United States.