Monarch Nectar Plants

Maritime Northwest

Left to right: Monarch on showy milkweed, Lewis' mock orange, and monarch on Pacific aster.

The Maritime Northwest is a region of windswept coastlines, temperate rainforests, sprawling grasslands, and subalpine meadows. It encompasses the coastline and coastal ranges of Washington, Oregon, and northern California; the western slopes and crest of the Cascade mountains to the east; and the open prairies and agricultural lands of the Puget Trough and Willamette Valley in between. The variety of elevations and rainfall patterns found in this area has created diverse plant communities that support a number of native pollinators and other wildlife. Monarch butterflies, while scarce from the Willamette Valley north due to natural limits on milkweed distribution, can still be found in this region during the summer months.

Each spring, monarchs leave hundreds of overwintering sites along the California coast and fan out across the western landscape to breed and lay eggs on milkweed, the monarch's host plant. Several generations are likely produced over the course of the spring and summer, and by May monarchs begin arriving in the Northwest. In late summer and early fall, western monarchs migrate back to overwintering sites in California, where they generally remain in reproductive diapause until the spring, when the cycle begins again.

Monarchs at overwintering sites in Mexico and California have declined dramatically since monitoring began in the late 1990s. Across their range in North America, monarchs are threatened by a variety of factors. Loss of milkweed from extensive herbicide use has been a major contributing factor, and habitat loss and degradation from other causes, natural disease and predation, climate change, and widespread insecticide use are probably also contributing to monarch declines. Because of the monarch's migratory life cycle, it is important to protect and restore habitat across their entire range. Adult monarchs depend on diverse nectar sources for food during all stages of the year, from spring and summer breeding to fall migration and overwintering. Caterpillars, on the other hand, are completely dependent upon their milkweed host plants. Inadequate milkweed or nectar plant food sources at any point may impact the number of monarchs that successfully arrive at overwintering sites in the fall.

Providing nectar-rich flowers that bloom where and when monarchs need them is one of the most significant actions you can take to support monarch butterfly populations in the Maritime Northwest. This guide features native plants that have documented monarch visitation, bloom when monarchs are present in the region, and are commercially available. Beyond supporting monarchs, many of these plants attract other nectar- and/or pollen-seeking butterflies, bees, moths, and hummingbirds. For a list of native plants that host butterflies and moths specific to your zip code see nwf.org/nativeplantfinder. The species in this guide will be adaptable to growing conditions across most of the region. Please consult regional floras, the Biota of North America's Plant Atlas (bonap.net/napa), or the USDA's PLANTS database (plants.usda.gov) for details on species' distributions in your area.

MONARCH JOINT VENTURE

XERCES SOCIETY for Invertebrate Conservation

GARDEN FOR WILDLIFE

Bloom		Common Name	Scientific Name	Flower Color	Max. Height (Feet)	Water Needs Low, Med, or High
		Forbs				
	1	Bluedicks	*Dichelostemma capitatum*	Purple	3	L
Spring to Summer	2	California compassplant	*Wyethia angustifolia*	Yellow	2	M
	3	Common sunflower	*Helianthus annuus*	Yellow	5	M
Spring to Fall	4	Coastal sand verbena	*Abronia latifolia*	Yellow	1	L / M
	5	Cobwebby thistle	*Cirsium occidentale*	Pink / white / purple	4	L
	6	Lyall aster	*Symphyotrichum hendersonii*	Blue / purple	5	L / M
	7	Narrow-leaved milkweed	*Asclepias fascicularis*	Pink / white	3	M
Summer	8	Pacific aster	*Symphyotrichum chilense*	Purple	5	L
	9	Sierra larkspur	*Delphinium glaucum*	Blue / purple	6	H
	10	Western vervain	*Verbena lasiostachys*	Purple	3	L
	11	Heartleaf milkweed	*Asclepias cordifolia*	Pink / purple	3	L
	12	Mountain monardella	*Monardella odoratissima*	White / purple	1	L
	13	Rough Canada goldenrod	*Solidago canadensis* var. *salebrosa*	Yellow	7	M
Summer to Fall	14	Showy milkweed	*Asclepias speciosa*	Pink / green / purple	3	M
	15	Sulphur-flower buckwheat	*Eriogonum umbellatum*	Yellow	3	L
	16	Western coneflower	*Rudbeckia occidentalis*	Brown / green	6	L / M
		Shrubs and Trees				
	17	Blueblossom	*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*	Blue	15	L
Spring to Summer	18	Lewis' mock orange	*Philadelphus lewisii*	White	10	L
	19	Littleflower penstemon	*Penstemon procerus*	Blue / purple	1	L
Spring to Fall	20	Western white clematis	*Clematis ligusticifolia*	White	20	M
	21	California buckeye	*Aesculus californica*	White / pink	20	M
Summer	22	Coyotebrush	*Baccharis pilularis*	White / yellow	6	L
	23	Nettleleaf giant hyssop	*Agastache urticifolia*	Purple / red	2	L
Summer to Fall	24	Rubber rabbitbrush	*Ericameria nauseosa*	Yellow	8	L

Notes

This list of monarch nectar plants for Maritime Northwest was produced by the Xerces® Society. For more information about monarch conservation, please visit www.xerces.org

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All species perennials, unless otherwise noted.
Attracts other bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. An early spring bloomer.
Drought tolerant with big yellow flowers.
Annual. A favorite of many bee species. Easy to establish and tolerant of clay soils.
Tolerates salt spray and prefers sandy soils. Can bloom year-round.
Biennial. Attracts bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds. Larval host for several butterfly species.
Good nectar plant for native bees and butterflies.
Monarch caterpillar host plant. Tolerates clay soils and wet or dry conditions.
One of the latest fall-blooming plants. Important for pre-hibernation bumble bee queens. Clay tolerant.
Attractive to butterflies and hummingbirds.
Can be aggressive in the garden. Long bloom season. Attracts butterflies.
Monarch caterpillar host plant. Extremely drought tolerant once established. Appropriate for Southern Oregon gardens.
Does best at mid to high elevations. Attracts many species of butterflies.
Can be aggressive in the garden.
Monarch caterpillar host plant. Extremely attractive monarch nectar plant.
Attracts many species of bees and butterflies.
A favorite of bees.
Amazing pollinator plant. Host plant to many butterfly species. Birds will eat the seeds.
Flowers give off amazing orange fragrance and attract bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds.
Great for rock gardens. Attracts hummingbirds.
Semi-woody vine. Widely adaptable and tough species that can form a dense mass if not controlled.
Nectar source for many native butterflies.
Extremely drought tolerant.
Establishes better from transplant than seed. Tolerates clay soil and wet conditions.
Very drought tolerant. Extremely attractive to monarchs.

Planting for Success

Monarch nectar plants often do best in open, sunny sites. You can attract more monarchs to your area by planting flowers in single species clumps and choosing a variety of plants that have overlapping and sequential bloom periods. Monarchs are present from May through September in the Maritime Northwest, although they are much less frequently seen in the northern part of this region. If you are located further inland, check out our guide for the Inland Northwest, available at: xerces.org/monarch-nectar-plants.

Why Plant Native?

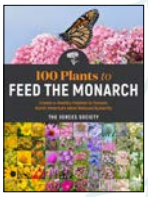
Although monarchs use a variety of nectar plant species, including exotic invasives such as butterfly bush (*Buddleja* spp.) and English ivy (*Hedera helix*), we recommend planting native species. Native plants are often more beneficial to ecosystems, are adapted to local soils and climates, and help promote biological diversity. They can also be easier to maintain in the landscape, once established.

Tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) is a non-native plant that is widely available in nurseries. This milkweed can persist year-round in mild climates, allowing monarchs to breed throughout the winter rather than going into diapause. Tropical milkweed may foster higher loads of a monarch parasite called Oe (*Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*), which negatively impacts monarch health. Because of these implications, we recommend planting native species of milkweeds in areas where they historically occurred. You can read more about Oe in a fact sheet by the Monarch Joint Venture: https://tinyurl.com/89cmcaeb.

Protect Monarchs from Pesticides

Both insecticides and herbicides can be harmful to monarchs. Herbicides can reduce floral resources and host plants. Although dependent on timing, rate, and method of application, most insecticides have the potential to poison or kill monarchs and other pollinators. Systemic insecticides, including neonicotinoids, have received significant attention for their potential role in pollinator declines (imidacloprid, dinotefuran, clothianidin, and thiamethoxam are examples of systemic insecticides now found in various farm and garden products). Because plants absorb systemic insecticides as they grow, the chemicals become distributed throughout all plant tissues, including the leaves and nectar. New research has demonstrated that some neonicotinoids are toxic to monarch caterpillars that are poisoned as they feed on leaf tissue of treated plants. You can help protect monarchs by avoiding the use of these and other insecticides. Before purchasing plants from nurseries and garden centers, be sure to ask whether they have been treated with systemic insecticides. To read more about threats to pollinators from pesticides, please visit: xerces.org/pesticides.

Additional Resources



- *100 Plants to Feed the Monarch by The Xerces Society:* xerces.org/books
- *Gardening for Butterflies by The Xerces Society:* xerces.org/books
- *Attracting Birds, Butterflies, and Other Backyard Wildlife*: https://tinyurl.com/2p8c7zjm

From the Xerces Society

- *Conservation Status & Ecology of the Monarch Butterfly in the U.S.:* xerces.org/us-monarch-consv-report
- *Guide to Milkweeds and Monarchs in the Western U.S.:* xerces.org/western-us-monarch-guide
- *Guide to the Native Milkweeds of Oregon*: xerces.org/or-mw-guide
- *Guide to the Native Milkweeds of Washington*: xerces.org/wa-mw-guide
- Milkweed Seed Finder: xerces.org/milkweed-seed-finder

Websites

- The Xerces Society: xerces.org/monarchs
- Monarch Joint Venture: monarchjointventure.org/resources
- Natural Resources Conservation Service: nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/monarch-butterflies
- National Wildlife Federation: nwf.org/butterflies

Community Science Efforts in Oregon & Washington

- Western Monarch Milkweed Mapper: monarchmilkweedmapper.org
- Monarch Butterflies in the Pacific Northwest: facebook.com/MonarchButterfliesinThePacificNorthwest
- Monarch Watch Tagging Program: monarchwatch.org/tagging
- Journey North: journeynorth.org/monarchs
- Monarch Larva Monitoring Project: mlmp.org
- Project Monarch Health: monarchparasites.org

Data Sources

Nectaring data and observations, background information, and other contributions to this publication were taken from the published literature and generously provided by multiple researchers, gardeners, partners, and biologists. For the full list of data sources, please visit our website: xerces.org/monarch-nectar-plants.

Have you seen monarchs on native nectar plants?
Share your monarch nectar plant observations with Xerces at https://tinyurl.com/XercesMNPO

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