

Plant Multiple Species of Native Milkweeds for Monarch Caterpillars

By: Shannon Trimboli, Busy Bee Nursery and Consulting, Reprinted with permission from Backyard Ecology

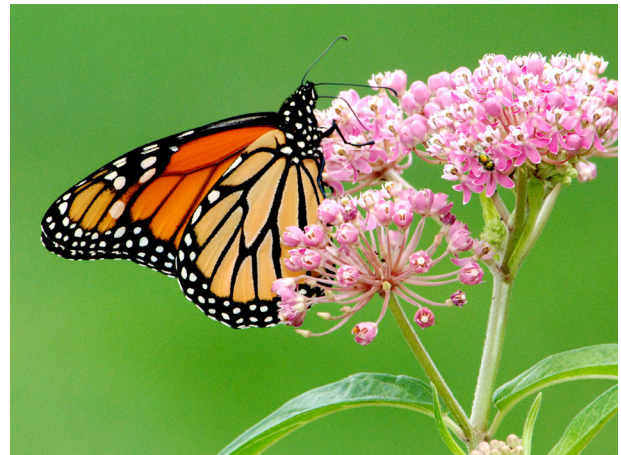
I'm often asked what is the best species of milkweed to grow for monarchs. There isn't a single answer to that question. In fact, planting multiple species is better than planting a single species.

Milkweed Diversity

Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), swamp or rose milkweed (*A. incarnata*), and butterfly milkweed (*A. tuberosa*) are the most commonly planted milkweeds in our area. However, there are 13 species native to Kentucky. Each of these species of milkweed grows in different habitats, grows to different heights, has different sized leaves, blooms at different times, dies back at different times, etc. And all of these factors can make the vegetation more or less attractive as place for mama monarchs to lay their eggs. No single species is going to be "the best choice" for monarch caterpillars all season long or in all locations.

Mother Knows Best

Mother monarchs will preferentially lay their eggs on milkweeds that they detect will provide the best food for the monarch caterpillars that hatch. For example, early in the season, they often prefer to lay their eggs on taller species with wider leaves. Later in the season, those originally preferred species tend to get tougher vegetation or die back. At that point, the mother monarchs will often switch to laying more eggs on shorter milkweed species or species with thinner leaves that stay relatively tender.



Planting multiple species of native milkweeds in your garden or on your property provides mother monarchs with more choices for where to lay their eggs. Photo credit: USFWS Midwest Region, public domain

How We Can Use This Knowledge

Having access to several different species of milkweed provides the mothers with the opportunity to choose the species that will be best for their caterpillars at that particular point in the season. This may encourage more egg laying monarchs to visit your property. You don't need to grow all of the milkweed species native to Kentucky. Even just growing butterfly milkweed and either common milkweed or swamp / rose milkweed will provide valuable milkweed diversity in your garden or on your property.

The good news is that butterfly milkweed, common milkweed, and rose milkweed or swamp milkweed are all relatively easy to find in native plant nurseries. If you want to add other species of milkweed to your property and can find them, then even better. But, just having two or three different species will do just fine. Both the monarch caterpillars and their mamas will thank you for the diversity.

Caution

If you are buying your milkweed at a nursery that doesn't specialize in native plants, then pay close attention to the scientific names. There is a non-native species that sometimes goes by some variation of the common name butterfly milkweed. However, some research shows it isn't as good for monarchs in this region as our native species.



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ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION

April 9th at Keriakes Park

Wild Ones SoKY Chapter will be giving away Kentucky native Oak tree seedlings for you to plant in your yard.

Oak trees support a wide variety of wildlife. They support 534 species of butterflies and moths, more than any other type of tree. Their offspring, caterpillars, are necessary food for adult and baby birds thus feeding our native bird populations.

The acorns support squirrels, deer, chipmunks, rabbits, wild turkey, quail and many more species.

Come get your free tree



Southern Kentucky Chapter

APRIL & MAY EVENTS 2022

GUIDED TOUR AT TAYLOR HOLLOW

10:00 AM-12:00 PM CDT on Saturday, April 2nd
400-416 Bear Carr Rd, Westmoreland, TN

ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION

9:00 AM-1:00 PM CDT Saturday, April 9th
Keriakes Park at 1220 Fairview Avenue, Bowling Green
Free trees and tree care information

WILD ONES SOKY CHAPTER NATIVE PLANT SALE

10:00–2:00 PM CDT on Saturday, April 23rd
Jim Roberts Park on North Road in Franklin KY
Simpson County Earth Day Festival

SHANNON TRIMBOLI - PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS

Presentation 10:00 AM and Plant Sale 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM CST
Saturday, April 23rd
Lost River Cave, 2818 Nashville Road, Bowling Green

ALICIA BOSELA - IRONWEED NATIVE PLANT NURSERY

6:00 PM CDT Tuesday, April 26th
Warren County Cooperative Extension Office 5162 Russellville Rd
Hosted by Warren County Master Gardeners

WILD ONES SOKY CHAPTER MAY MEETING

7:00 pm CDT Thursday, May 12th via zoom
Native Plants that Feed the Insects that Bats Eat, for KY and TN
Erin Cord of Bat Conservation International