

# Planting a Monarch Waystation



## How to Get Started

**Choose a plot.** We recommend planting both milkweed and nectar plants so that Monarchs will stick around to feed and breed. At least 4 nectar plants, 10 Narrowleaf Milkweeds, and a plot of 100 square feet are ideal, but outdoor container gardens are also a good option for those short on space.

**Plant your Narrowleaf Milkweed seeds** while it's still cool (February is the best time). Use a well-draining soil like a seed starter mix in a seed tray, place in a sunny spot, and keep the soil damp. Move seedlings to small pots when they have 4-6 true leaves (true leaves are the leaves that grow after the initial one or two cotyledons). Transplant seedlings into your garden in late spring.

**Add any nectar plants** you want to include when you plant your milkweed seedlings. To stay environment-friendly, we recommend the following native, drought-tolerant plants:

- Brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*)
- Cleveland sage (*Salvia clevelandii*)
- Cedros Island Verbena (*Verbena lilacina* 'De La Mina')
- California Lilac (*Ceanothus, any species*)

**Water milkweeds regularly (once a week)** for the first summer to establish the plants. Soak through about once a week, or whenever the soil feels dry to the touch.

**Watch for monarchs!** Females will land on the edges of leaves and curl their abdomens under to lay small yellow, waxy eggs. In a few days, yellow-and-black striped caterpillars will start to eat the milkweed leaves. Three to eight days after that, look for green chrysalises on the plant or nearby:



Two or three weeks later, you should see the characteristic orange-and-black monarch wings through the now-transparent chrysalis cuticle. Keep a close eye out for *eclosure* (emergence)!

### Why Narrowleaf Milkweed?

This species is native to Southern California and helps to reduce the risk of fungal infections in Monarch larvae.



*Asclepias fascicularis.*

Photo credit: Las Pilitas Nursery

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## Gardening Tips

**Spot water the original soil.** The soil that comes with the plant often dries out more quickly than the earth in your garden. Don't hesitate to keep that soil, however—it's important to keep plant roots as intact as possible when transplanting.

**Plant high.** Dig a hole almost as deep as your plant (an inch or two less is great) and twice as wide. Leaving the plant a little higher than the ground allows essential gas exchanges at the root crown. It's also important to avoid covering the stem with mulch or loose dirt for the same reason.

**Don't use pesticides.** Pesticides kill insects, including the monarch caterpillars you're trying to attract! But milkweed plants attract other insects besides monarchs. Aphids (small, orangey insects) are common on milkweed, and are often cultivated by ant colonies for their excrement, which the ants feed on. You may also see red-and black milkweed bugs. Allowing spiders, ladybugs and other insect predators to take up residence in your garden can help keep your miniature ecosystem balanced, and this is a great learning opportunity for your class to observe what happens when you leave an ecosystem to itself!

## Resources

<http://www.monarchwatch.org/index.html>

<http://www.laspilitas.com/easy/california-butterfly-garden.htm>

[http://www.laspilitas.com/butterflies/Butterflies\\_and\\_Moths/Monarch/Monarch\\_butterfly.htm](http://www.laspilitas.com/butterflies/Butterflies_and_Moths/Monarch/Monarch_butterfly.htm)

<https://www.cnps.org/cnps/nativeplants/gallery/callahan/index.php>

<http://theodorepayne.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Butterflies>

<http://www.monarchwatch.org/milkweed/prop.htm>