**“Contribute to the Restoration of Monarch Population”**

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Monarch butterflies are a favorite part of San Antonio area landscapes. The beautiful insects visit spring and fall blooms such as zinnia, lantana, cosmos and duranta. It is disturbing to hear the reports that fewer monarchs reached their wintering grounds. We are not sure why, but habitat reduction, pesticide use and especially the weather probably share the blame.

The same reports that provided the reduced counts on the wintering grounds give us hope that populations can increase if rains increase this year. The rain will contribute to more blooms for nectar along the migration routes north. The reports also mention that area gardens along the way can help if there are more flowers planted.

In addition to more flowers, we can encourage Monarchs to breed by providing Asclepias as egg-laying sites. Asclepias is also called milkweed or butterfly weed. This genus of plant is the only source of food for growing Monarch caterpillars and the only place where they will lay their eggs.

Plant three or four plants of any of the Asclepias in full sun in your landscape and the chances are good that breeding Monarchs will lay a batch of eggs on the plants this spring.

The Monarchs that lay the eggs will soon die but their larvae (caterpillar) grow through several stages while feeding on the Asclepias and soon emerge as adult butterflies. This second generation moves further North to reproduce and repeat the process to produce a third and fourth generation. In the fall, the fourth generation migrates from Canada and other Northern points back to the wintering grounds in Mexico and California. This fourth generation lives much longer than generations one, two and three (nine months), and they are the individuals that will make it back to Texas next spring to start the cycle all over again on our milkweeds.

The neat and important thing is that you can contribute to this remarkable cycle by having a few Asclepias plants in your landscape. There are native and exotic species at area nurseries. Monarchs will use any of the species. Some of the exotic milkweeds have flowers that are more attractive but all attract Monarchs.

Plant them in full or partial sun in corners of your landscape to provide nectar and breeding sites for the Monarchs.

It is a simple formula for helping restore Monarch numbers, at least that portion that died off because of dry weather and the resultant reduced blooms. Don’t be surprised however if you have an unusually difficult time on finding transplants at your favorite nursery. Apparently many area gardeners have heard that Monarch numbers were reduced on the wintering ranges and there have been a run on Asclepias plants as everyone tries to do their part to help restore Monarch numbers.