

Menomonie Community Garden is also a Monarch Way Station

By Helen Wright

The Menomonie Community Garden is a wonderful place to grow vegetables and flowers, and also grow friendships. It has also become a certified Monarch Way Station providing both host plants...milkweeds , and nectar flowering plants for Monarch Butterflies.

In order to be certified as a Monarch Way Station several criteria must be met:

Size: An effective Monarch Way station must be at least 100 square feet. This was easily accomplished by one 25 ft x 20ft garden plot dedicated to Monarch host plants and nectar plants.

Exposure: Butterflies and Butterfly plants need a lot of sun. Monarch Way Stations need to be located in an area that receives at least 6 hours sun daily. This was easily established in the south facing plot.

Soil Type and Drainage: Since the Milkweed and nectar plants do best in a relatively light soil which is well drained, the southern plots in the Community Gardens are perfect.

Shelter: Monarch Watch recommends planting Milkweed relatively close together as all life stages of the Monarch need shelter from the elements and predators. Planting Milkweed next to nectar plants helps with this shelter. The Monarch Butterflies will roost in trees and do not choose the so called 'Butterfly houses' with the narrow slits in them but moths will use these for shelter.

Milkweed plants: Monarch Watch recommends at least 10 milkweed plants of at least 2 species, although a large number of one species would be sufficient. There are at least 3 species of Milkweed in the garden and these are Common Milkweed, Butterfly Weed, and Showy Milkweed. Since there are 13 species of Milkweed in Wisconsin, it is not hard to provide a

variety of species and choosing different species which mature and flower at different times provides the host plants for a longer breeding season. Milkweed is needed by the caterpillars.

Nectar Plants: The Menomonie Community Garden has many flowering plants. The Monarch Butterflies need nectar. This is important throughout the season but particularly important in August and September as these are the Monarch Butterflies that make the long migration from Wisconsin and other northern states to Mexico. Nectar plants include Zinnia especially the single flower types like Profusion and Starbright, Marigolds especially single flower types, Alysum, Cosmos, Ageratum, Wild Bergamot (Bee Balm), Purple Coneflower, Liatris, Black Eyed Susan, Joe Pye weed, and Asters to name a few.

Cabbage, Broccoli, Kale, Kohlrabi are host plants for the Cabbage White Butterfly. Viola is the host plant for Fritillaries. Parsley, Dill, Carrots are host plants for the Swallowtail Butterflies. Many people think that they are seeing Monarch caterpillars on Dill but these are Swallowtail caterpillars that look quite a lot like Monarch caterpillars.

Good Management of the site: To sustain a Monarch Waystation, Monarch Watch recommends management practices like mulching, thinning, testing and amending the soil, eliminating insecticide use, and removing invasive species to name a few. Again, the whole Menomonie Community Garden helps support these practices.

(adapted from the Monarch Watch Waystation Certification Requirements, for further information please visit www.monarchwatch.org/waystations)

The Monarch Butterfly is amazing. The Monarch Butterflies that emerge (a process known as eclose) from chrysalis in early to mid summer are sexually mature, first mate when they are at least 3 days old and live 2-6 weeks. The Monarch Butterflies that emerge in mid August in this part of Wisconsin are sexually immature and these are the Monarchs that make the long 1800 mile migration from here to Mexico. They live about 7 months and after overwintering in Mexico will mate and the female lays her eggs in the southern states. Her children and grandchildren are the generations

that make it back to Wisconsin. They have never been here before, just as the super generation, those that migrate to Mexico have never been there before. This is nature's intelligence at work.

So now we are beginning to see the super generation of migrators.

The writer believes it to be very important to help all of the generations. A female can lay 500 eggs but only 1-2% make it to becoming an adult butterfly. At this time of the year there are many hungry predators including wasps, spiders, tachinid flies, dragonfly, and OE protozoa (*Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*).

By collecting the Monarch eggs and raising caterpillars in a controlled space, providing a safe space for the caterpillar to J up and then go into chrysalis, the survival rate through to Monarch Butterfly can be around 90%.

Many factors appear to have contributed to the decline of the Monarch Butterflies including loss of breeding habitat, loss of overwintering habit, climate change, pesticides and natural predators. As you see Monarch Butterflies at this time of the year, consider the incredible journey they are making. It could be up to 3000 miles if flying over our part of Wisconsin from Canada. They need nectar all the way along their journey. Each caterpillar matters. Each Monarch Butterfly matters, and they need food! Wouldn't you for such a long journey. So I recommend planting Milkweed for the Monarch to lay her eggs on, and for her caterpillars to feed on, then nectar plants especially in the fall. And if you have the inclination to help further, help raise Monarch Butterflies. It is one of the most rewarding and inspiring things that I do.

There are many resources locally and online. My love of Butterflies, especially Monarchs was rekindled by visiting then volunteering at Beaver Creek Reserve Butterfly House. There are many educational opportunities here. (www.beavercreekreserve.org)

And of Course, there is Menomonie Community Gardens at 2500 9th St E, Menomonie WI 54751 or on the web at www.menomoniemunitygardens.com