

### Monarch Migration

I'm sure that many of you know about the migration of monarch butterflies. For those of you who do not or anyone who needs a refresher.....monarchs spend the winter in roosting spots. Monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains fly to areas along the California coast while monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains fly south to forests in the mountains of Mexico. This is a two way migration that happens in spring and fall, but monarch butterflies that fly north in spring are not the same butterflies that return in the fall. The butterflies that fly south in the fall, are the spring butterflies' children's grandchildren.



Not only are there two major migratory populations of monarchs in the U.S., but there may also be a population that overwinters in south Florida. A biologist at the University of Florida discovered recently that a non-migratory population of monarchs in south Florida also contained monarch

butterflies from the Midwest and Texas. She discovered this using a technique called stable isotope analysis which looks at chemicals that are fixed in the monarch's wings as the wings developed and can therefore be tracked to plants fed upon as caterpillars. This paper suggests that monarchs may be overwintering in other locations than Mexico and California.

Many people want to know how they can help the monarch population as there are numerous news reports on how populations are declining. One way that most likely will NOT work is by rearing monarch butterflies to release into the wild. Researchers have found that monarchs raised in captivity are unable to orient for migratory purposes. Some monarch researches are against the practice of releasing captive bred monarchs into wild populations for fear of disease transmission and the possibility of genetic effects when captive-bred butterflies mate with wild populations. You can read their statement here:

[https://monarchlab.org/images/uploads/attachments/Captive\\_Breeding\\_and\\_Releasing\\_Monarchs\\_oct2015.pdf](https://monarchlab.org/images/uploads/attachments/Captive_Breeding_and_Releasing_Monarchs_oct2015.pdf)

What can we do to help wild monarch populations?

1. Plant NATIVE milkweed and a pollinator garden. While spring monarch populations rely on milkweed to lay eggs and rear young, fall populations rely on nectar plants to provide energy for the journey south.
2. Use an IPM approach for managing pests in your environment.
3. Become a citizen scientist. There are numerous organizations that track monarch butterflies such as Monarch Watch and Journey North.

Go to this site to find out more about Texas monarchs and milkweed.

<http://texasento.net/dplex.htm>

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at [www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com](http://www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com)

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