

BUCHANAN'S

NATIVE PLANTS

Saving the Monarch Butterflies

Buchanan's greatly appreciates our customers' wonderful efforts to help reverse the Monarch butterfly's population decline. Since their decline is largely man-made, we all feel responsible to help in any way we can.

Not everyone cares about Monarchs. Some milkweed growers spray milkweed with insecticides to kill aphids and other insects that can make the plants less attractive to customers. Others grow milkweed near where they spray other plants and the spray drifts onto the milkweed.

Buchanan's has been struggling with this problem for years, trying to get clean plants for our customers. We now buy from a limited number of growers. We know their milkweed is grown in controlled situations away from insecticides. These growers also avoid over-fertilization, which also has been known to harm the butterflies.

Please remember the Monarch is faced with many new threats once they arrive in our back yards.

- O.E. is a disease that is killing many Monarchs. It lives on the milkweed plants where it infects the butterflies. The epidemic has been made worse because some Monarchs are not migrating and the disease spreads quickly in a static population. We cannot test our milkweed for O.E.
- Wasps take a great number of caterpillars to feed their young. Much smaller Trichogramma wasps lay their eggs inside or on the caterpillars.
- Many of us have seen our butterflies sickened or killed after municipal spraying and fogging for mosquitos. Many, many residents of the Houston area now use mosquito misting systems that can kill butterflies as easily as they kill mosquitos. These and other air born insecticides often drift far from where they were intended to work.
- The lack of migration also increases in-breeding in the local Monarch population. This weakens them and makes them more susceptible to other threats.
- Keep in mind that these Monarch stressors are interactive. For example, a butterfly fighting O.E. is much more susceptible to a small amount of insecticide in the environment.

When buying milkweed, we suggest

- Buying multiple plants to start out. That way you won't have to keep coming back for more.
- When you get home, rinse the milkweed before planting.
- Don't put all your caterpillars on your new milkweed at first. Try putting one or two on the new plants for a few days to see how they react.

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Some things to remember when helping the butterflies

- **Growing native milkweed** is a great alternative to tropical milkweed. Buchanan's carries seeds for at least four different native milkweed species. We also provide a tip sheet for the best way to grow them in Houston. The seeds are somewhat more difficult to grow, requiring stratification in the refrigerator. But the benefits are worth the effort for many of us. Introducing diversity in the milkweed population in the Houston area is sure to help Monarchs in their fight for survival.
- Our efforts to help the Monarchs, despite being the right things to do, are not part of a natural process. We are intervening in that process to try to reverse harm that has been done to the Monarch population. Since the efforts are not natural, we are bound to hit some bumps in the road and some individual caterpillars and butterflies will die. However, the overall Monarch population will benefit.
- Monarch butterflies are special because of their amazing migration. But swallowtails and many other butterflies in the Houston area need our help. Remember to plant host plants and nectar plants for them as well.

Lastly, as many of you know, some recently released research had very important things to say about feeding Monarchs. Growing tropical milkweed at the wrong time of year can affect the Monarch Butterfly's migration habits. It encourages the butterflies to remain in the south (i.e. Houston) and not migrate. This contributes to O.E. infection and their overall decline.

Because we want to do all we can to help our customers help the Monarchs, Buchanan's will continue to sell tropical milkweed in the spring and summer. However, we strongly encourage our customers to cut it back in October and continue to cut back new growth monthly until March.