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A Good Story—The Return of the Monarch Butterfly

Who among us doesn't remember chasing after butterflies when we were children....their colors were always so appealing - and the stories we were told about how the butterfly came from that funny looking caterpillar.



Here a few interesting "tid bits" about the Monarch Butterfly....

- How long does the Monarch live? ...the first 3 or 4 generations have a 2-6 week life span and the 4th or 5th generation, called the "Methuselah Generation" will migrate to Mexico, their winter home, will live 4-6 months.
- Where do monarchs lay their eggs?....they lay their eggs on the underside of the leaves of the milkweed plant. No milkweed - no monarchs.
- The Monarch caterpillar only consumes the leaves of the milkweed plant.
- Every year, the main population, 4th or 5th generation, numbering in the tens of millions migrates from Canada and the US to overwinter in Mexico. That's a journey of more than 5,000 kilometers undertaken by tiny creatures weighing less than a gram.
- What are the threats to the monarch?

One of the many effects of climate change will be wetter and colder winters. If they are dry, monarchs can survive below freezing temperatures, but if the monarchs get wet and the temperature drops they will freeze to death. Because hundreds of millions of monarchs are located in such a small area in the Sierra Nevada of Mexico during the winter, a cold snap there could be devastating.

A second threat to monarch is the loss of their source of food - Milkweed!

Over recent years we have heard that the Monarch Butterfly was disappearing....that they were approaching extinction - and that there was little that we could do to stop this. But was this really true? Sadly it was....according to the Canadian Wildlife Federation the number of monarchs making the flight plummeted by about 90% from historic numbers.

However the current situation has shown a vast improvement....Mexico has cracked down on illegal logging that destroyed monarch habitat and is working to create ecotourism as a replacement for lost revenue. The US has engaged in extensive replantings of the Butterfly Weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and wildflowers along highways that monarchs need for nectar and egg-laying.



This is where we come in.....We can help by planting butterfly weed in our gardens....there are many types of butterfly weed....I have the orange one, the straight species, but I have also planted the pink version.....so let's all help these beautiful creatures continue to survive and create many wonderful memories of chasing butterflies in the garden for generations to come.