

**LESSON****PLANTING MILKWEED  
FOR MONARCHS**

**TIP:** If planting in pots or seed flats, you can plant in several different pots or cut the seed flats into smaller sections to share between 3-4 students. This helps spread the students out and stay focused.

**DESCRIPTION:**

Students plant milkweed seeds and learn about the relationship between milkweed and monarch butterflies.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION:**

Some plants stand out in the plant community as being particularly beneficial in the garden in a number of ways. Milkweed is one of these and is home to monarch butterflies. A key to having monarchs in your garden is to have plenty of milkweed around. Monarch butterflies lay their eggs on the leaves, and their caterpillars feed entirely on a diet of milkweed.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- Students learn to plant milkweed
- Students learn that monarch butterfly caterpillars need milkweed to survive

**COMMON CORE STANDARDS:**

ESS2.E Biogeology

*Plants and animals depend on the resources in the place they live and change their local environment.*

**TIME: 30–45 MINUTES****MATERIALS:**

- Milkweed seeds.
  - » Try to find seeds for a variety of milkweed native to Southern California—*Asclepias fascicularis* (Narrow-leafed) is ideal for restoration efforts. Las Pilitas nursery, which specializes in CA native plants sells this variety by the pound on their website: <http://www.laspilitas.com/nature-of-california/plants/asclepias-fascicularis>
- Small shovel
- Organic potting mix (buy bagged or make your own)
- Deep pot(s), seed trays, or outdoor space to plant
- Masking tape and pencil for names and dates
- Water
- (optional) Spray bottles

**LESSON**  
**PAGE 02****PREP:**

- Have the space where you plan to plant the milkweed ready to plant. Alternatively, you may bring your class out with you to help amend the soil for planting the following day.
- It is important to plant early enough (by at least 2 months) so that the milkweed is available to the Monarch butterflies.
- Read a book about monarch butterflies. Monarch and Milkweed by Helen Frost is a great story of the relationship between monarchs and the milkweed plant with beautiful illustrations.

**ACTIVITY: (30-45 MINUTES)**

1. Introduction: Explain that Monarch butterflies and milkweed have a symbiotic relationship, which means that one helps the other. The milkweed provides food and shelter for the Monarch butterflies, their eggs, and their larvae.
2. In the garden, divide your students into groups of 3- 4 and give each group a number of seeds to plant.
3. Firmly press seeds 1/8 inch into the prepared soil and lightly cover with soil (be sure not to bury the seeds too deep because they need lots of sun and warmth to grow).
4. Other plants that have this relationship include basil and tomatoes. Basil improves growth and flavor of tomatoes and repels flies and mosquitoes.
5. If starting in cold weather, you can start these in seed flats or pots in a greenhouse or sunny windowsill.
6. Water gently with spray bottles and keep watered according to instructions on seed pack.

**DISCUSSION:**

1. Why do we plant milkweed?
2. What do the caterpillars and butterflies use the milkweed for?
3. What are other examples of symbiotic relationships between plants and animals or insects?

**TEACHER TIP:**

- Students can check in on their seeds and chart their progress in their science journals at regular intervals.