



## A TALE OF THE MONARCH AND THE MILKWEED

*The monarch butterfly may be the most widely recognized of all American butterflies with its distinct orange, black, and white wings. Found throughout the United States, as well as Mexico and Canada, one of the most notable characteristics about the monarch is the astonishing 3000 mile journey some will make in the fall to their wintering grounds in the Sierra Nevada Mountains of Mexico or to southern California, depending on which part of the United States or Canada they migrate.*

During the past two decades, the population of overwintering monarchs in Mexico has plummeted by as much as 90 percent, primarily as a result of habitat loss in the United States.

In their larval stage monarch caterpillars feed almost exclusively on **the common milkweed (Asclepias syriaca)** and as adults get their nutrients from the nectar of the flowers. The monarch will always return to areas rich in milkweed to lay their eggs upon the plant. The milkweed they feed on as a caterpillar is actually a poisonous toxin and is stored in their bodies. This is what makes the monarch butterfly taste so terrible to predators.

Due to the drastic decline in the population of the Monarch butterfly, the Ohio Pollinator Habitat Initiative (OPHI) is seeking public involvement to collect and drop off common and swamp milkweed seed pods from established plants, September 1 through October 30 at collection stations around the state. The seeds will be used to establish new plantings and create additional habitat for the Monarch butterfly throughout Ohio in the coming years.

OPHI was formed in response to the 2014 petition to list the Monarch butterfly as federally endangered. Its partners include state of Ohio agencies, universities, corporations, and non-profit organizations. They can be reached at (614) 416-8993.

### THE COMMON MILKWEED



“What should I be Collecting?”  
“How do I Collect Them?”

#### Identification of Common Milkweed

**Location:** Grows in sandy or rocky soils along roadways, open fields, prairies, forest margins & waste areas.

**Stem:** Generally has stout **SINGLE** stem growing from thick base. Stems are hairy and can grow to 6.5 ft. tall.

**Leaves:** Opposite leaves –broadly ovate to elliptical blades. Sparse hair on the bottom.

**Flowers:** Round clusters, 20-30 small pink/white flowers per cluster. Bloom May to August.

**Seed Pods:** Plump, tear-shaped pods, warty surface & gold/gray to brown when ripe.

- **When collecting, please note the date and county of collection on the paper sack, then bring them to the:**

**Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District office located at 500 Market Street, Mezzanine floor, suite 4, Steubenville, OH 43952. Office hours are Monday through Friday; 8:00 am to 4:30 pm.**

### POD COLLECTION TIPS

- Locate common milkweed stands. Establish ownership and arrange for the owner to conserve the stand until the seed pods are ripe and ready to harvest.
- **Do not harvest seed pods before they are ripe.** Seeds develop best when left to ripen on the stem.
- Periodically check the progress of the pod. Common milkweed pods will go from soft green to a gold/yellow or gray to brown. When pods appear ready, test the seams. If they easily pop open with gentle pressure, they are ready.
- **Do not collect pods that are already open** as they may have been infested by the giant milkweed beetle. These orange/black beetles can damage the seed making it non-viable. (see photo)
- Milkweed beetles will not eat their way into the pods but will wait for the pod to open. To prevent their entry use a small rubber band, lightly wrapped around the pod but not crushing it. (see photo)
- Once harvested, keep pods in **paper grocery bags** to avoid the development of mildew or mold. **Never store in plastic.**



*Monarch Butterfly feeding on common milkweed in open field*



*Banded pod*



*Giant milkweed beetle*

