



## RAISING MONARCHS IN A SAFE HOME

I loved to raise Monarchs when I was a kid. I made my own little caterpillar home in a shoe box with a cheesecloth top. I found the caterpillars on a giant milkweed plant (*Calotropis gigantea*) that was in a neighbor's yard, carefully removed the caterpillars and the leaves on which they were feeding, and took them home to my shoe box caterpillar house. I gathered fresh leaves every day after school, watched as they grew and formed their chrysalises, and released them when they turned into butterflies.

Here in Florida, I purchased scarlet milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) for the Monarchs, and became frustrated by seeing caterpillars, but never seeing their chrysalises or watching butterflies emerge. A little research told me my caterpillars were likely being eaten by lizards, toads, and birds. Oh my!

During my research I read an article about raising monarchs in a butterfly cage. I mentioned it to my daughter, who was also seeing caterpillars on her milkweed plants but few chrysalises. A little while later she bought one for me as a birthday surprise, plus a few milkweed plants that I kept in pots in my yard until the Monarchs found them and laid eggs. Then I moved the plants into the cage. I soon had to buy more scarlet milkweed because as the caterpillars grew, they stripped the original plants bare! So I was kept busy rotating plants in and out of the cage.

The cage, called RestCloud®, measures about 17' square and 30" tall when fully open. It's made of nylon mesh on three sides and clear plastic on one side with a fabric bottom panel and a mesh top. One side zips open so you can water the milkweed plants and release the butterflies when they're ready. It's collapsible for easy storage and can be reused. Directions and hints for raising butterflies are included.

During the summer my daughter had great success and released over 30 monarchs. I didn't release as many, but did release over 15 butterflies. I learned that windy days can cause the cage and plants to fall over. The solution to windy conditions is to put the plants in a heavy pot that will anchor the cage.

My plants were all scarlet milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) which is a non-native butterfly plant. In the future I will purchase native plants to attract the Monarchs and other species of butterflies. A list of native and non-native host plants for the caterpillars and nectar plants for the butterflies is on the following page.

I hope you have fun raising Monarchs!

More information about raising Monarchs can be found at: <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/publication/UW311> where this list was found.

#### **NATIVE LARVAL HOST PLANTS FOR MONARCHS IN SOUTH FLORIDA**

Curtiss' milkweed (*Asclepias curtisii*)  
Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)  
Fewflower milkweed (*Asclepias lanceolata*)  
Longleaf milkweed (*Asclepias longifolia*)  
Savannah milkweed (*Asclepias pedicellata*)  
Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)  
Whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)  
Green antelopehorn (*Asclepias viridis*)  
White vine (*Sarcostemma clausum*)



Monarch on purple coneflower

#### **NATIVE NECTAR PLANTS FOR MONARCHS IN SOUTH FLORIDA**

Mist flower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*)  
Cat's tongue (*Melanthera nivea*)  
False blazing star (*Carphephorus corymbosus*)  
Flat-topped golden rod (*Euthamia caroliniana*)  
Yellow top (*Flaveria linearis*)  
Goldenrod (*Solidago fistulosa*, *odora* var. *chapmanii*, *sempervirens* or *stricta*)  
Spanish needles (*Bidens alba* or *bipinnata*)  
Blazing star (*Liatris garberi*, *gracilis*, or *chapmanii*)  
Climbing aster (*Symphotrichum carolinianum*)  
Hempvine (*Mikania cordifolia*)  
Scorpiontail (*Heliotropium angiospermum*)  
Crownbeard (*Verbesina virginica*)

#### **NON-NATIVE HOST PLANTS**

*Asclepias curassavica* Scarlet Milkweed  
*Calotropis gigantea* Giant Milkweed (purple or white flowers)  
*Calotropis procera* Apple of Sodom (purple or white flowers)

#### **NON-NATIVE NECTAR PLANTS**

Pentas  
Zinnias  
Marigolds  
Mexican Sunflowers  
Purple Coneflowers  
Many other annuals



Butterflies and chrysalises in the cage