

## Kid's corner

### Monarch Butterflies

A few months ago, Kids' Corner previewed the cabbage moth. There has been an amazing influx of butterflies, moths and dragonflies over last spring and summer due to the amazing rains that we experienced.

Over the summer holidays I had such pleasure watching monarch butterflies emerge from their chrysalis. My cousin has milkweed growing in her garden which is the only source of food for the caterpillars. Milkweed is so important for the existence of the monarch butterfly which was placed on the endangered list in 2022. Although native to Mexico it was introduced to Australia in 1871.

As a child, we called milkweed the "swan plant" as the seed head was similar to that of a swan. We also loved to see them pop when the seed head would burst open and fly away into the sky.

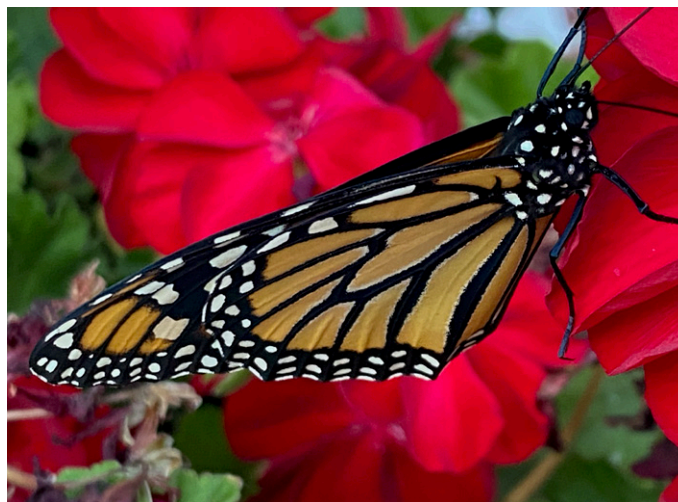
Plants in the milkweed family are the single most important source of food for the threatened monarch butterfly and planting a patch or two in your landscape would be an important contribution to the continued existence of the species.

Although the milkweed plant is toxic to humans, the coloured orange wings of the butterfly are a warning sign to its predators that it is poisonous as there are toxins in its amazingly colourful spotted body. The monarch butterfly has a predator in Australia, the Pied Currawong.

The monarch butterfly lays its eggs underneath the leaves of the milkweed. Even though they may not have been laid on the same day, they can hatch all at the same time.

Milkweed is a tropical plant, so it prefers warm weather. Milkweed needs full sun to thrive, so if you are thinking of growing it, be sure to choose a spot in your garden that gets at least six hours of sunlight per day and be mindful that its **seeds disperse easily and it can be invasive and a nuisance to farmers and toxic to livestock.**

As the caterpillars grow they shed their skin five times, then hang upside down to spin the chrysalis. They can take up to 1 - 2 weeks before they emerge from their chrysalis. Their chrysalis is the most beautiful thing that I have seen in nature. It has spots of gold on it and as the chrysalis ages the outside turns from green



to a brown colour and then at the very end before emerging you can see the outlines of the wings and their patterns.

When emerged they start to stretch their wings and let them dry for about five hours before flying away.

There are lots of Australian native plants that you can grow to encourage insects into your garden. Growing these plants encourages pollination and is a food source for the insects. Always ask your local garden centre which plants would be suitable for your soil and climate.

To name a few, look out for everlasting daisies, rice flowers, daisy bushes and sweet bursaria. There are many, many more too!

**"Milkweeds are most toxic during rapid growth, and retain their toxicity even when dried in hay. Toxicity varies with the species and growing conditions, however all milkweeds should be considered potentially poisonous, especially the narrow-leaved species".**



Good luck! We would love to see pictures of your potatoes. Send them to [operations@opengardensvictoria.org.au](mailto:operations@opengardensvictoria.org.au)