

Published November 10th, 2021

Digging Deep with Goddess Gardener, Cynthia Brian

By Cynthia Brian



A majestic monarch lands on a zinnia. Photos Cynthia Brian

"If a butterfly flutters its wings in Brazil, could it cause a tornado in Texas?" ~ Edward Lorenz, meteorologist

Almost everyone has heard of the "butterfly effect." Originally based on weather and climate predictions, it has become a metaphor for the effects of chaos theory - the concept that small events can have huge widespread consequences.

As I was driving home from work one late October day and listening to a radio program chronicling the rapid extinction of many species on our planet, I was struck by the comment that 99.9% of monarch butterflies have vanished from the West Coast.

Only a few years ago, I had enjoyed a glorious November morning in Pismo Beach among thousands of monarchs fluttering through the gum trees at Monarch Grove.

Knowing that the Moraga Garden Club had a goal of revitalizing the monarch butterfly population with its "Moraga for Monarchs" mission, I drove straight to Rancho Laguna Park to investigate the progress of the project. I was blown away at how quickly the area had developed from barren land to a lush, organic, ecologically beneficial beauty basin. The co-founders, Julie Stagg and Bobbie Preston, are quick to point out that this has been a community project of love with support not only from the members of the Moraga Garden Club, but from the town of Moraga, Saint Mary's College, Moraga Garden Center, Moraga Park and

Recreation Foundation, numerous service organizations, and wildlife experts.

The "Moraga for Monarchs" goal is simple: repopulate monarchs throughout town while providing public monarch habitats, educating citizens, and providing plants to support monarchs and other pollinators in private landscaping.

Following their lead, every gardener can easily invite a bevy of beneficials to take up residence in the garden. Their website is a cornucopia of ever-evolving information about nectar plants, milkweed gardening, building a habitat, as well as supportive plants that are currently being installed in the Rancho Laguna Park Monarch Garden.

By first planting nectar plants that bloom February through April followed by monarch-specific nectar plants for blooming in October and November, a garden will be attractive to pollinators in all seasons. Besides butterflies, bees, birds, hummingbirds, lady beetles, bats, and other helpful insects will be darting and swooping through this nourishing landscape.

When I visited, swaths of cosmos in several colors had grown to over eight feet high. Purple, salmon, and chartreuse zinnias shone in the sunlight. Black-eyed Susan, purple verbena, agastache, lobelia, sage, mints, yarrow, and butterfly bush were hosting bees and butterflies, including several monarchs. A trickling rock waterfall powered by the sun offers a sweet drink to the flyers. The water feature is flanked by a river rock dry creek that provides a sunning area for the butterflies surrounded by cosmos, zinnias, and lobelia as an artful caterpillar stands watch. Milkweed is growing to feed the caterpillars. Passionflower vines twine up the wooden pergola and wood chip paths meander throughout the plantings. Signage has thoughtfully been installed throughout the beds to instruct visitors on the species planted. The habitat is fenced to keep out hungry predators as well as people. Soon benches will be installed so that visitors can rest and watch. Volunteers maintain the garden, carefully pulling out the insidious bindweed, and lovingly pruning, deadheading and sowing.

There is something magical about witnessing the flight of a butterfly as it gathers pollen on its legs and disperses it as it flits from flower to flower. Everyone can enjoy a butterfly waystation next spring by planning now. If you want to erect a monarch and pollinator oasis, check out the resources provided by the Moraga Garden Club in collaboration with the Xerces Society and Monarch Joint Venture at moragagardenclub.com/moraga-for-monarchs.

Here is a list of milkweeds and other plants that you'll want to consider recommended by the Moraga for Monarchs garden.

MILKWEED

It is recommended to only plant California native milkweeds.

Approved for Lamorinda

Narrow Leaf (*Asclepias fascicularis*)

Showy (*A. speciosa*)

California (*A. californica*)

Woolly (*A. vesta*)

Heartleaf (*A. cordifolia*)
Not Advised for Lamorinda
Common Milkweed (*A. syriaca*)
Butterfly Weed (*A. tuberosa*)
Tropical Milkweed (*A. curassavica*)
Other Milkweed

SUPPORTIVE PLANTS

Agastache
Anise Hyssop
Bee Balm
Black-eyed Susan
Brodiaea
Butterfly Bush
California Brittlebush
Catmint
Ceanothus
Coyote Mint
Coral Bells
Cosmos
Echinacea
Goldenrod
Hairy Gum Plant
Lavender
Liatris
Lithodora
Lobelia
Lupine
Meadow Blazing Star
Mint (several)
Monkey Flower
Oregon Grape
Passionflower
Passion Vine
Penstemon
Rosemary
Salvia
Sage
Scarlet Monardella
Seaside Daisy
Snake Lily
Sweet Joe Pye Weed
Sunflower
Tithonia
Verbena
Yarrow
Zinnia

Butterflies may be free, but the Monarch is on the possible extinction list. We all need to do our part to save our planet by saving our pollinators. We already know that bees are dwindling and so many other critical species are endangered. Start pesticide and insecticide-free gardening habits. By being proactive with organic gardening practices and establishing healthy habitats, we will all enjoy our personal paradises while supporting our garden guardians.

I dream that when a butterfly flutters its wings in Lamorinda, it will cause peace throughout the world.

Nature lovers are welcome. The Moraga for Monarchs Butterfly Garden is free. For more information on Moraga for Monarchs or to donate, visit <https://www.moragagardenclub.com>

Happy Gardening. Happy Growing.



A heart of love on a zinnia shines brightly blooming with the Black-eyed Susan. Photos Cynthia Brian



The solar-powered rock waterfall and the artistic caterpillar. Photos Cynthia Brian



The pergola provides a centerpiece and shade for the fenced garden. Photos Cynthia Brian



A close-up of a gorgeous deep pink zinnia. Photos Cynthia Brian



This Monarch fluttered from zinnias to Black-eyed Susan flowers.



Purple Agastache and purple zinnias at the Moraga Butterfly Garden.



Salmon zinnias in the Monarch Garden.



Cynthia Brian, The Goddess Gardener, is available for hire to help you prepare for your

winter garden. Raised in the vineyards of Napa County, Cynthia is a New York Times best-selling author, actor, radio personality, speaker, media and writing coach as well as the Founder and Executive Director of Be the Star You Are!r 501 c3. Tune into Cynthia's StarStyler Radio Broadcast at www.StarStyleRadio.com. Buy copies of her books, including, Chicken Soup for the Gardener's Soul, Growing with the Goddess Gardener, and Be the Star You Are! www.cynthiabrian.com/online-store. Receive a FREE inspirational music DVD and special savings. Hire Cynthia for writing projects, garden consults, and inspirational lectures. Cynthia@GoddessGardener.com www.GoddessGardener.com

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA