

Cover Story

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Building the #MilkweedMovement

Kylee Baumle



Pollinators are a hot topic these days. Actually, for garden centers, pollinators have always been at the forefront of the business, but customers are now becoming more aware of their importance and want plants and products that make their gardens more pollinator friendly.

Bees have reigned supreme for a long time now, but in the last few years, Monarch butterflies have been of concern because of their dwindling numbers. This year, ironically, the Eastern population posted a 144% increase over 2017-2018, while the Western population

(Monarchs west of the Rockies) suffered an 86% loss over the same period.

Pictured: At the entrance to Enchanted Gardens, a large sign attracts attention to the #MilkweedMovement program.

Because the Monarch butterfly is beloved in the insect world, gardeners have rallied to help their situation by working hand-in-hand with garden centers, which provide the plants, seeds and advice for optimizing their gardens. Organizations are also providing the means for people to come together to give Monarchs a better chance of recovering from their decline.

Enchanted Gardens, an independent garden center in Richmond, Texas (near Houston), has taken its Monarch efforts to a higher level and the entire area is benefiting in a myriad of ways. Over the years, owner Joey Lenderman has been involved with several fundraisers for non-profits in the area and he recognized how difficult it can be for these organizations to raise money beyond covering their expenses. He started laying the foundation early to connect the two seemingly unrelated activities: helping the Monarchs and supporting local non-profits.

Texas is a crucial link in the Monarch migration, since the Eastern population funnels through the state on the way to Central Mexico in the fall, and they lay their first eggs in Texas in the spring as they make the return trip north. That got Joey thinking about what his garden center could do to benefit them.

Enchanted Gardens is a registered Monarch waystation (#10,329), and was already actively promoting Monarchs and milkweed. They hold educational seminars every Saturday in the spring and fall, often bringing in special speakers. The programs that are centered on butterfly gardening or wildlife seem to have the best attendance. The

garden center also has free printed materials readily available for their customers at all times in a designated area, with information about Monarchs, and about host and nectar plants.

“We Can Do More ...”

Earlier this year, Joey introduced an idea to his staff that didn't just involve holding a variety of events at the garden center that would benefit pollinators, with an emphasis on Monarchs. He wanted to help the non-profits with their fund-raising efforts, too. The staff embraced his ideas and enthusiastically helped to implement the plan.



Pictured: Joey Lenderman, second-generation owner of Enchanted Gardens, shows off a caterpillar.

Monarchs need milkweed to reproduce; it's the only food source that the young caterpillars will eat. But milkweed can often be hard to come by. Its image as a weed for so many years has been a challenge to overcome, and not only were gardeners often reluctant to plant it, garden centers weren't selling it either. With awareness and education, there's been a shift in thinking and milkweed is now in higher demand.

Enchanted Gardens sells 12 varieties of milkweed native to Texas, as well as tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) and giant milkweed (*Calotropis gigantea*), which makes the garden center a go-to place to find what Monarchs need, and more and more gardeners want. But satisfying the Monarchs and customers alike is only part of Joey's plan.

Because of his desire to not only help the Monarchs, Joey wanted his garden center's efforts to also benefit families with special needs, so he pledged to donate all profits from the sales of milkweed to three local groups:

- Mustard Seed Farm & Market is a 501c3 horticulture-based work-training program for adults with disabilities located in Richmond. Donated monies go towards their building fund to construct a work program building.
- Hope for Three is a 501c3 non-profit and autism advocacy group that provides resources and support to families living with autism spectrum disorder. They also generate awareness through outreach, education and events.
- The Monarch School is a primary and secondary school in Spring Branch (Houston) that serves children with neurological disorders and learning disabilities.

Future Goals

The program is in its early stages, but it's Joey's wish that, by his example leading the way, other nurseries and garden centers will become involved in a similar manner to benefit charities in their own areas.

“When we all work together for a great cause, wonderful things happens,” he says.

Joey is proud of his staff and how they've been so supportive of his idea, right from the start. They join together to encourage the public to help by purchasing milkweed from participating nurseries, and to spread the word about their mission on social media by posting photos of their own milkweed, and using the hashtag #MILKWEEDMOVEMENT. Even if people don't have the means or ability to garden themselves, just making others aware of the program will further their cause and benefit the program.

Out of a passion for nature, this garden center has created a way for everyone to win—their business, the Monarchs

and the community around them. **GP**

Kylee Baumle is a freelance writer and photographer. She gardens on an acre in Northwest Ohio, where she also raises and tags migrating Monarch butterflies. She can be reached at ourlittleacre@gmail.com. Kylee also has written the book on Monarch butterflies, quite literally! Her book, "The Monarch: Saving Our Most-Loved Butterfly," is available through St. Lynn's Press.

How Can You Help?

Enchanted Gardens Owner Joey Lenderman would like other garden centers and customers across the U.S. to get involved, too. Here's how you can help:

- Spread the word on social media and make families and friends aware of the #MilkweedMovement
- Contact Ashley at Ashley@myenchanted.com to find out how your garden center can coordinate similar activities related to the #MilkweedMovement
- Buy milkweed from participating nurseries
- Take a picture with your milkweed and post on social media with #milkweedmovement

About the Business

Joey Lenderman grew up in his parent's part-time nursery business and Enchanted Gardens got its start as a full-time business in 1995. Part of the Enchanted Nurseries and Landscapes family, along with the Enchanted Forest, the third generation is now getting involved in the family business. Find them online at <https://enchantedgardensrichmond.com/>