

The Gardening Page

N o r w a l k
P u b l i c L i b r a r y



To the Rescue! Saving the Monarch Butterflies!



Greetings Gardeners and Appreciators of Our Natural World!

On May 30, the Norwalk Public Library was in for a real treat: we were expecting a visit from butterfly rescuer, Marsha Vetare.

I am so grateful that Marsha has agreed to do an interview with me for The Gardening Page!

Butterflies played an important part in my own childhood. Behind our backyard was a large butterfly field. Each summer, my sister and I spent whole days neck-high in wildflowers and meadow; emerging only for supper, joyfully covered in burs.

I find that, especially now—when the May migratory birds have gone away from here (I miss them!)—I fill with delight on seeing a butterfly.

I hope you will enjoy my interview with Marsha! First, please take a moment to watch this incredible video of a monarch butterfly emerging from its chrysalis:

[Click Here to Observe a Monarch Coming Out of Its Chrysalis!](#)



All the best,

Sally



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Sally's Interview with Marsha Vetare, Butterfly Rescuer



Sally: Hi Marsha! Tell us a little about your Monarch Butterfly Rescue!

Marsha: Sure! Monarch butterflies have a 3-5% chance of survival in the wild. We plant lots of milkweed (in CT we grow common milkweed, swamp milkweed, and butterfly weed). When the monarchs lay eggs on the milkweed, we carefully collect them and bring them either indoors— or into an outdoor protected enclosure— since there are many birds and insects that will eat the eggs. We care for them by keeping their enclosures clean and providing fresh milkweed. They eat and eat and eat, and grow and grow, and go through five instar stages. At the fifth instar they will form their chrysalis. It will be about 10-14 days before they eclose (come out of their chrysalis). They will hang for 3-4 hours in the enclosure to dry their wings and then we release them into the wild!

Sally: That's amazing! I had never before heard the butterfly's emergence from its chrysalis referred to as eclosing. And I never knew about instar stages, either. Thanks so much for that!

I think you work with Sandy Schill on the rescue? Can you tell us how the two of you met?

Marsha: Sandy is a local photographer in Sandy Hook, and a bird lover. I started in photography, and am also a bird lover. We met at a local camera club in Newtown. She was telling me about the monarchs, and I knew I had milkweed in my garden, but knew nothing about it. She came to my house, and she found about twenty eggs on my milkweed! The rest is history! I released fifty-two monarchs my first year, and one hundred and fifty two my second year. This year I have much more milkweed, and am hoping to surpass last year's number!



Sally: Wonderful! Yes, Sandy was going to be joining you as a speaker here May 30. I hope someday to be able to meet her! I am glad we are mentioning her in your interview.

As a child did you ever dream you'd be saving butterflies one day? Did you always love butterflies?

Marsha: As a child, I always loved nature (inherited that trait from my mom). Until two years ago, I never even thought I'd be helping the monarch population—I have Sandy to thank for that!

Sally: What role does the milkweed plant play in the life of a monarch? I believe you start milkweed plants from seed indoors so they are ready for spring? Tell us a little about that!



swamp milkweed

Marsha: Milkweed is the ONLY plant monarch butterflies will lay their eggs on and it is the ONLY plant the monarch caterpillars will eat. Because some varieties of milkweed are not the most attractive (mostly common milkweed), people pull it out of the ground or chop it down. It does take a couple of years before they bloom, and the blooms are beautiful and very sweet smelling. Butterfly weed is very attractive with small orange flowers, but their leaves are very narrow and harder to find the eggs on. Milkweed forms pods in the fall which open, and the seeds will naturally spread making more milkweed plants in the spring. You can collect those pods and harvest the seeds, and either spread them where you like in the fall or keep them in your refrigerator until spring and plant them. I start seeds indoors around February/March under a grow light. Some I end up planting in my garden, some are given away at butterfly events, and some I keep in pots so I can simply put the pot inside an enclosure for the hungry caterpillars.



monarch caterpillar



milkweed pod



butterfly weed



common milkweed

Sally: Yes! You were kindly going to bring *us* some of your milkweed plants during your visit here at the Norwalk Public Library! Hopefully, next time!

Can you offer any advice for folks who would like to help save the butterflies themselves? What could they do to help?

Marsha: Start by planting milkweed and lots of it! Educate your friends, family and neighbors about the importance of milkweed. There are large fields being destroyed and it's heartbreaking. You can either let nature take its course, or you can cover your garden with netting once the eggs are laid. Or you can bring the eggs indoors or put them in an enclosure.





One very important thing to know is pesticides kill caterpillars, or can result in a deformed chrysalis or butterfly. It's best to grow your milkweed from seed or get your plants from a reputable nursery that is pesticide-free.



Sally: Thank you, Marsha! That's a wonderful introduction to the wide world of butterfly rescuing! I have a butterfly weed plant in my own garden. I planted it last year, and—lo and behold—it was still there this year! I also planted additional saved milkweed seeds right into my garden bed. Wouldn't it be lovely to get a caterpillar— or two?!

