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## Saving Butterflies

### Insect Ecologist Spearheads Creation of Oases for Endangered Butterflies

January 1, 2005 — Waystations for monarch butterflies are sprouting up around the country. With milkweed plants and flowers such as zinnias that produce lots of nectar, these gardens will provide oases for the butterflies to lay eggs and feed during their migration. Monarchs migrate from Mexico throughout the U.S. every year from spring to autumn, but their numbers have been shrinking to record lows due to loss of habitat.

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LAWRENCE, Kan.--We've seen them and probably taken them for granted. But if we don't do something now to save the monarch butterfly, they could disappear. Now scientists have a new plan to help put these butterflies back on the map.

These kids are getting an up-close lesson on butterflies. But to hold one, you've got to catch one, and that's not always easy.

That's because finding one is harder. Too many houses, paved parking lots, and fewer farms are decreasing the monarch butterflies' habitat, causing their numbers to shrink to record lows.

Insect ecologist Chip Taylor, of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, says, "We can get a lot more people involved, we can create a lot more restored habitat."

In the spring, butterflies migrate from Mexico through the United States. Along the way, they rely on certain plants to feed and reproduce. Now, Taylor is starting a new effort to get people around the country to create waystations -- or butterfly gardens -- to help preserve the insects.

"We conceived of the idea of creating monarch waystations, that is little stopping points along the entire migration where the butterflies can get the resources they need," Taylor says.

To create a waystation, add milkweed plants and flowers like zinnias that produce lots of nectar to any garden. Monarchs use these plants to lay eggs and feed.

Dr. Taylor says they're going to try and create 10,000 waystations in the next three years. It's a fun and easy way to help keep this beautiful part of nature fluttering before our eyes.

In September, the monarchs begin their reverse migration to Mexico. To receive a waystation kit that includes information about how to create the best habitat for monarchs, please visit [www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org).

**BACKGROUND:** People can help preserve the monarch butterfly by participating in a program to set up 10,000 "waystations" in backyards and gardens across the U.S.

**THE PROBLEM:** The population of monarch butterflies is deteriorating rapidly y down to one-tenth of its peak in 1996 - thanks to urban sprawl and the use of herbicide resistant crops. Monarchs lay eggs on milkweed plants, and larvae feed on the plants until they become adult butterflies. Adults drink nectar from flowers. But the critical milkweed and nectar sources are declining.

**THE WAYSTATION PROGRAM:** Every spring and fall monarch butterflies migrate: they head to Mexico for the winter and migrate back to the U.S. for the summer for breeding. By setting up "waystations" for monarch butterflies along the migration route, people can make sure the insects have enough food to survive the trips, and their numbers will begin to increase.

**ABOUT METAMORPHOSIS:** Insects like the monarch

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go through three stages: larva (caterpillar), pupa (when the larva hibernates in a sac), and adult. Monarchs go through the entire process in about three months, but some species of butterfly can take as long as several years to go from the egg to adult stage.

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**HOW TO GET INVOLVED:** Get your own waystation kit online at [www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org), or by calling 1-800-780-9986. Kits contain seeds for milkweeds and nectar plants.

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