

July - Week 1

Milkweed and Monarchs- Life Stages

Have you ever taken a moment to watch a monarch butterfly? With their large, vibrant orange wings, monarch butterflies are one of the beauties of summer! They are easiest to find by milkweed plants, as that is where adult monarchs lay their eggs. This time of year, you might find an egg, a tiny whitish dot, on the underside of a milkweed leaf. This egg will hatch a very tiny caterpillar, so small they are easy to miss. This tiny caterpillar finds food easily, as it eats only milkweed leaves. As it grows bigger, its skin becomes too small, so it sheds its skin and then it begins eating again! A caterpillar eats, grows, and molts 5 times! Then the large caterpillar finds a place to hang upside down in a J position and becomes a beautiful green and gold chrysalis. It takes 8-12 days for the chrysalis to transform into an adult butterfly. It is an amazing thing to watch any of the steps in the process!

The milkweed plant is interesting as well! This time of year, the common milkweed usually has clusters of lavender flowers and the beginnings of seed pods. Happily for monarchs, there are over a dozen types of milkweed plants in Minnesota, living in a variety of habitats and with a variety of bloom times. Monarch adults can usually find some type of blooming milkweed so they can eat the nectar on the same plant where they lay eggs.

Keep an eye out in places around you for milkweed plants and for monarch butterflies. What stages of the monarch lifecycle can you see? What stages of the milkweed plant lifecycle are evident? What other flying insects do you see? How do they interact with the plants around them? In your journal draw an insect and a plant it interacts with, labeling any life stages you notice.



Monarch on Milkweed flower.