



Sarasota County Butterfly Club

NABA Chapter

[www. SarasotaButterfly.com](http://www.SarasotaButterfly.com)

Monarchs, Oe and Milkweeds

- 🦋 Monarchs are tropical butterflies that summer in the US and Canada and rely on Milkweed to propagate their species. Various local native milkweeds grow across their breeding grounds, yet Monarchs have also co-evolved with the addition of Tropical Milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*) to the landscape. Tropical Milkweed is readily available for purchase in garden centers, is easy to grow, and, in warmer climates unlike native milkweeds, does not naturally die back in the winter. There are conflicting views on the role of Tropical Milkweed cultivation with Oe infections in Monarchs.
- 🦋 Oe is short for *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, a protozoan parasite that infects Monarch and Queen butterflies worldwide.
- 🦋 Oe is a parasite that has to live within its host to grow and multiply. It survives as spores that are resistant to environmental conditions and can lay dormant on plants.
- 🦋 Once a butterfly has been infected with Oe, it will not recover.

What is our chapter position on milkweed cultivation?

- 🦋 South Florida has a unique micro-climate and we have monarch populations year round.
- 🦋 What we recommend is not necessarily appropriate for other parts of the country.
- 🦋 Science has not proven that the tropical milkweed is definitely responsible for OE.
- 🦋 In scientific studies, female monarchs actually chose tropical milkweed over native milkweed to lay their eggs on, as a way of “self-medicating”.¹
- 🦋 We have not had much success growing native milkweeds and they are hard to find.

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-  We will continue to plant the Tropical Milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*).
-  We will continue to find ways to grow native milkweeds. Some of the natives suggested for south Florida are listed below.
-  Many sources suggest cutting all milkweed species back to the ground to regenerate fresh leaves in spring to mimic nature's wintering dieback in the warmer climates. We do not recommend cutting back in our region.
-  As with most science, this is an evolving story and we are watching it closely to see if we will change our position.

Native Larval Host Plants for Monarchs in South Florida²

Curtiss' milkweed (*Asclepias curtisii*)

Swamp milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*)

Fewflower milkweed (*Asclepias lanceolata*)

Longleaf milkweed (*Asclepias longifolia*)

Savannah milkweed (*Asclepias pedicellata*)

Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

Whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*)

Green antelopehorn (*Asclepias viridis*)

White vine (*Sarcostemma clausum*)

For more info:

http://monarchjointventure.org/images/uploads/documents/Oe_fact_sheet.pdf

<http://www.learnaboutmonarchs.com/learnaboutoespore.html>

<http://monarchwatch.org/biology/control.htm>

¹ http://www.ted.com/talks/jaap_de_roode_how_butterflies_self_medicate?language=en

² <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/uw311>