Spring 2025

The Chrysalis

Emerging news from Monarchs Across Georgia

Our mission is to inspire caretakers of the natural environment through monarch and pollinator education

MONARCHS ACROSS GEORGIA

A committee of the
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION ALLIANCE

Upcoming Events

[Jill's Butterfly Garden Workshop & Native Plant Giveaway](#)
April 19
10 AM to 3 PM
Gainesville

[MAG Pollinator Symposium](#)
May 17
State Botanical Garden of Georgia
Athens
Pre-order books by: May 1
Register by: May 10

[Pollinator Week](#)
June 16-22

[Great Southeast Pollinator Census](#)
August 23-24

Registration Open for MAG's 2025 Pollinator Symposium

Monarchs Across Georgia is thrilled to welcome pollinator conservationist and award-winning author, Heather Holm, as keynote speaker for its 2025 Pollinator Symposium, May 17 at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in Athens.

The deadline to register is May 10 (or when the event reaches capacity — so register early!). MAG is also offering a selection of books from symposium partners and presenters available for pre-order by May 1:

- *Pollinators of Native Plants: Attract, Observe and Identify Pollinators and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants* by Heather Holm
- *Doctors by Nature: How Ants, Apes & Other Animals Heal Themselves* by Jaap de Roode
- *Pollinators & Native Plants for Kids* by Jaret C. Daniels

Holm's keynote topic is, "Attracting Bees and Beneficial Insects with Native Plants." Sunrise Nursery will be on-hand with a selection of plants for sale. The plant list will be posted to the symposium webpage by May 1. Following the keynote, attendees will be able to pick their preferred presentation from three sets of concurrent sessions:

10:30 - 11:30 AM
- Doctors by Nature - Japp de Roode
- Habitat Clinic for Pollinator Gardens - Shannon and Anthony Trimboli
- Pollinator Garden Tour - Donna Gast

12:30 - 1:30 PM
- Connect to Protect: A Call to Action from a Conservation Botanist, in Solidarity and in Hope - Jennifer Ceska
- Moths: The Unsung Heroes of Pollinator and Wildlife Gardens - Shannon Trimboli
- Butterfly Identification - Anna Yellin

1:45 - 2:45 PM
- Fireflies - Amaad Blades
- Searching for Signals of Monarch Butterfly Overwintering - Charlotte Hovland
- The Bugs in Your Backyard: Meet the Beneficial Insects Controlling Pests in Your Garden - Denise Wilson

Symposium Details

WHEN
May 17, 9 AM – 3 PM

WHERE
State Botanical Garden of Georgia (Garden Club of Georgia HQ, Terrace Room), 2450 S. Milledge Ave., Athens, GA 30605

COST
$85 (includes a catered box lunch from Marti's at Midday)

HOTEL
A block of rooms has been reserved at the Georgia Center. Book by April 16 using code 47925 or call 706-542-2134.

LINKS
Full Agenda
Registration
Presenter Info
Hotel Info

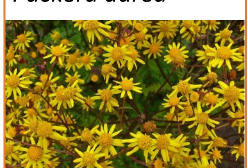
Do You Have this Year's Pollinator Plants in Your Garden?

Four plants are chosen annually: Spring Bloomer, Summer Bloomer, Fall Bloomer, and Georgia Native

Each year, the Georgia Pollinator Plants of the Year program recognizes four landscape plants as "top performers" that support pollinators *and* look beautiful in gardens. These include one Georgia native plant and three seasonal selections, which may or may not be native species. Plant lovers in Georgia can nominate their favorites, based on which plants perform well in their gardens and support high pollinator diversity.

The nominated plants are then evaluated based on their horticultural value, ease of propagation, and ecological significance. The State Botanical Garden of Georgia (SBG) calls on growers and gardeners to grow more of the winning plants. SBG also serves as a seed source for difficult-to-find plant selections.

The 2025 Pollinator Plants of the Year are:

Name	Description	Height	Growing Conditions	Bloom Time
Spring Bloomer: Chickasaw Plum *Prunus angustifolia* 	This small tree can be pruned to the size of a shrub since this species is prone to forming thickets. It serves as a larval host to many butterflies, including the eastern tiger swallowtail, coral hairstreak, spring azure, viceroy, and red-spotted purple. Its fruit is eaten by mammals, songbirds, and other wild birds. It can also be eaten by humans, although it's usually too tart to be eaten raw and is mostly used in preserves or jellies.	4 to 15 feet	Prefers full to part shade; medium water requirements	March to April *Photo courtesy: State Botanical Garden of Georgia*
Summer Bloomer: Beardtongues *Penstemon* 	Penstemons provide a significant nectar source for various bees, particularly the specialist mason bee, which exclusively feeds on species in the penstemon genus. They also are recognized for their ability to attract hummingbirds. Other insects, including moths, flies, solitary wasps, and butterflies also benefit from their nectar.	1 to 3 feet	Can grow in a range of light conditions, with medium water requirements; however, they flower best in full to partial sun. Tolerant of a range of soil types but requires well-drained soil.	May to June *Photo by: Alan Cressler*
Fall Bloomer: Climbing Aster *Ampelaster carolinianus* 	Enthusiastically grows to form a sprawling vine that can be pruned if the spread is not desired. Spacious beds with plenty of space to grow are ideal; the vine also looks good over fence lines. A larval host to the pearl crescent butterfly, the vine flowers profusely, attracting crowds of butterflies, bees, and other insects. Seeds set in late fall and are eaten by songbirds and small mammals.	Sprawling vine	Full sun to part shade; medium to high water requirements. Prefers a well-drained medium, but tolerates occasionally wet soil.	September to November *Photo by: Alan Cressler*
Georgia Native: American Golden Groundsel *Packera aurea* 	Can grow to form a thick ground cover, especially in shady areas, creating a golden carpet-like display of flowers. Known to be deer-resistant, it also serves as a vital source of pollen and nectar in early spring, benefiting numerous native bee species and various other insects.	1 to 2 feet	Full sun to shade; medium to high water requirements	March to April *Photo courtesy: Wikimedia Commons*

Proposed Listing of Monarchs as Threatened Species

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has announced a proposed rule to list the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus)* as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), accompanied by a 4(d) rule and critical habitat designation. While the proposed rule does not result in an immediate listing of the monarch under the ESA, it marks a significant step in the decision-making process for the protection of monarchs.

USFWS has initiated a 90-day public comment period to invite input from farmers, landowners, Native American tribes, members of the scientific community, and other stakeholders. Your participation is essential in providing diverse viewpoints to inform effective strategies for species protection.

The suggested regulation includes a 4 (d) provision to establish customized protections to promote conservation efforts while permitting specific human activities to persist. The proposal also identifies overwintering sites in California as "critical habitat" essential for the monarch's survival and recovery. However, this designation would not impose new restrictions on all private land.

Why Protecting Monarchs is Crucial

Monarch butterfly populations have experienced a decline exceeding 80% in certain regions, primarily due to habitat destruction, pesticide use, climate change, and various other threats. Without proactive measures, this species is at risk of becoming endangered.

As an indicator species, monarchs reflect the overall health of ecosystems. Their diminishing numbers highlight significant

challenges impacting biodiversity and the environments upon which we rely.

Renowned for their remarkable migration and striking appearance, monarchs serve as symbols of resilience and interconnectedness, captivating people globally. Conserving monarchs also supports other species, including pollinators and wildlife that share their habitats, thereby promoting biodiversity and essential ecosystem services.

This proposal presents a chance to involve communities, industries, and policymakers in proactive conservation initiatives before the situation for the species worsens.

How Would a Final Rule Impact Monarch Butterflies?

The completion of the listing would establish formal protections for monarchs and their critical habitats necessary for breeding, migration, and wintering. It would also ensure that federally funded initiatives incorporate monarch conservation considerations.

The listing would guide conservation strategies to incentivize proactive conservation measures and

See, "Proposed Listing," on page 12

8th Annual Garden Workshop and Native Plant Fundraiser

Jill Gorman's 8th Annual Butterfly Garden Workshop and Native Plant Fundraiser will be April 19 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. The day will begin with a presentation on using native plants to attract butterflies, followed by a tour of her gardens.

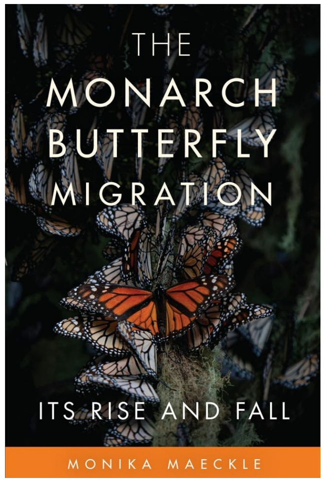
She plans to have about 6,000 seedlings representing more than 100 native species, which will be available for a cash donation of $1 each. All proceeds will be divided between Monarchs Across Georgia and the local public elementary school's fund for building and maintaining a pollinator garden.

Please bring boxes and/or trays if you plan to take home any plants. Most plants will be available in groups of 2 to 6 and will not be separated.

The event will be held at 5316 Innisbrook Lane, Gainesville, GA 30506. Don't forget to check her page closer to the event for more information and plant lists!

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The Monarch Butterfly Migration: Its Rise and Fall



Monika Maeckle's *The Monarch Butterfly Migration: Its Rise and Fall* offers a compelling exploration of one of nature's most remarkable phenomena—the annual migration of monarch butterflies. A seasoned journalist and butterfly advocate, Maeckle intertwines natural history, scientific research, and personal narratives to explore this extraordinary event.

The book traces the journey of millions of monarchs traveling from Canada and the U.S. to Mexico each autumn, a spectacle that captivated public attention in 1976 following a *National Geographic* cover story revealing their Mexican roosting sites.

This discovery solved a longstanding scientific mystery and spurred conservation efforts, including the establishment of butterfly sanctuaries in Mexico. However, decades later, concerns about the potential extinction of monarch butterflies have emerged.

In her book, Maeckle explores the intricate history and contemporary challenges facing the monarch butterfly. Along with some unique insights on the butterflies, she paints a complex picture of the evolving and often contentious community of scientists and enthusiasts who rally to champion the monarch's survival.

Maeckle examines the effects of climate change and the tensions between advocacy and scientific accuracy. The book serves as a call for environmental sustainability and reminds us to appreciate the natural wonders present in our surroundings. A highly engaging and informative read, *The Monarch Butterfly Migration: Its Rise and Fall* sheds light on the challenges facing monarch butterflies and underscores the broader implications for environmental conservation.

About the author: Monika Maeckle is the founder of the Texas Butterfly Ranch and the Monarch Butterfly and Pollinator Festival. She lives in San Antonio, TX, and has tagged more than 10,000 butterflies.

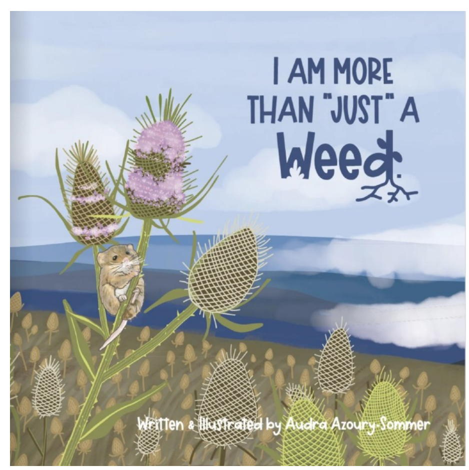
I Am More Than "Just" a Weed

I Am More Than "Just" a Weed, written and illustrated by Audra Azoury-Sommer, is designed to introduce kids to the world of plant identification. Azoury-Sommer attempts to challenge the perception that weeds are opportunistic plants that are merely an unwelcome nuisance. The widespread generalization that weeds are undesirable has led to an ignorance of the important roles these plants perform within their habitats.

Using fun rhymes and captivating illustrations of plants, bugs, and animals, the book offers a sensorial experience for readers and listeners. The book depicts common weeds encountered in lawns, fields, backyards, schools, and forests. The weeds introduce themselves and share what makes them unique.

Children will learn characteristics of plants that grow all around the world, including their seed dispersal methods. The book also explains various ways in which different insects, birds, and animals interact with these plants, whether by depending on them or avoiding them. Azoury-Sommer encourages children to appreciate each plant as a living entity that possesses inherent ecological value.

Note: One of the featured plants, garlic mustard, is considered highly invasive and destructive as it crowds out native plants and changes soil conditions.



About the author: Audra Azoury-Sommer is a Pittsburgh-based artist and author who finds beauty and value in the overlooked. In addition to authoring children's books, she also designs jewelry and ornaments.

Celebrating 30 Years of the Symbolic Monarch Migration

The 2025-26 academic year is the 30th year of the Symbolic Monarch Migration project. Many changes have occurred from its humble beginnings as an idea of Journey North founder, Elizabeth Howard, through its transition to Monarchs Across Georgia in 2018. Below are some reflections from Estela Romero, environmental educator for the project.

For centuries, a certain species of butterflies appearing in the sky in late October-early November, represented to our Indigenous people the souls of their beloved dead relatives visiting them as they did great preparations to set their altars on the Day of the Dead, an ancestral tradition kept for generations to let them know they would be never forgotten.

"They look like Bright Orange Jewels, they are also The Daughters of the Sun, they come with the Solstice, fertilize the soil, pollinate the flowers, and then leave in the Equinox."

Nowadays, we still keep our ancestral indigenous beliefs about them and celebrate their fantastic arrival each November 1st and 2nd, during our great festivities of the Day of the Dead.

Meanwhile, it had already been taking decades for foreign researchers to track the species, Canadian Dr. Fred Urquhart followed by Americans Dr. Lincoln Brower and Dr. William Calvert, who finally found out where in the remote Sierra Madre mountains in central México the fantastic and mysterious migrants overwintered.

I was then a 10-year-old child when my parents, running a small local hotel in town, hosted Dr. Lincoln and Dr. Calvert who were assisted by a local family up in the mountains to whom my parents made liable that cold and snowy winter, and which experience would be repeated each season for the next 45 years as Dr. Lincoln, Dr. Chip Taylor, and Dr. Karen Oberhauser traveled back and forth each season to make research on monarchs and their habitat bringing their colleagues and disciples from Canadian, U.S. and Mexican organizations and universities at these unique Oyamel fir forests, ancestral winter home for the exceptional species.

Estela Romero hands letters from students in Mexico to Susan Meyers.

Until then, most of our local families ignored over generations that our ancestral Oyamel fir forests had been the unique winter refuge, ideal habitat, and completion of their year's life-cycle for the survival of the extraordinary species.

Migratory monarch butterflies are regarded as one of the most important indicators of the equilibrium of ecosystems along their migration corridors from their breeding lands in Canada and the U.S. down to their overwintering Oyamel fir forests in central México.

However, involving local schools and citizen young generations making them even more aware of the importance of the conservation of their own unique local natural reserve, resulted in extreme importance.

For 29 years now, thousands of students and teachers have been sharing knowledge and unknown extraordinary aspects that characterize monarchs' habitats through the Symbolic Monarch Migration Project.

Over all these years, a large school and citizen community in the north have created thousands of Ambassador paper butterflies graciously designed and illustrated with conservation activities; they ship them as the real migration south to México occurs.

Mexican children living with their families and attending school throughout the overwintering forests of monarchs at over 10,000 feet elevation, receive, through these colorful butterflies, knowledge about monarchs' breeding instars and inspire themselves seeing how a large community in the north is doing conservation and habitat restoration at their homes, schools, and countryside areas to support monarchs.

See, "Symbolic Migration," on page 7

Spotlights for Your Pollinator Garden

Lyreleaf Sage
(*Salvia lyrate)*

Lyreleaf sage, *Salvia lyrate*, is a perennial characterized by its hairy texture and upright growth, typically reaching heights of 1 to 2 feet. Its base features a rosette of leaves that are distinctly divided into three lobes, while a few simpler leaves can be found higher up along the stem.

During winter, the large basal leaves exhibit a striking purple tint, adding to the plant's visual appeal. This species is notable for its square stem, a common trait among members of the mint family, and its unique, two-lipped flowers.

The plant's tubular flowers range in color from pale blue to violet, and are arranged in whorls that encircle the stem, culminating in an interrupted terminal spike.

Each flower measures approximately one inch in length and features a lower lip significantly longer than the upper lip. The upper lip consists of three lobes, with the central lobe forming a distinctive hood-like structure. The sepals of the flowers are purplish-brown, contributing to the overall aesthetic of this intriguing plant.

Source:
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

Top left: Larva of the southern pink moth (Pyrausta inornatalis). Photo courtesy BugGuide.net. Top right: Southern pink moth resting on a salvia azurea. Photo courtesy Nurture Native Nature.

Left: Lyreleaf sage inflorescence (Salvia lyrate). Photo by Alan Cressler. Top: Close-up showing lyreleaf flower shape. Photo by R.W. Smith. Both photos courtesy the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.

Southern Pink Moth
(*Pyrausta inornatalis)*

The southern pink moth, *Pyrausta inornatalis*, is a small, yet controversial pollinator. Measuring approximately ½-inch in length, it has a yellow head and body. Its distinctive pink forewings taper to a point, with a pale fringe along the lower edge. The hindwings are brownish-gray.

Its larvae, also around ½-inch long, are translucent with dark spots. They are known to bore into the buds and flowers of salvias, which serve as their primary host plants. Basil has also been identified as a potential larval host. The pupae are similarly small and translucent.

This moth is predominantly found in the southeastern U.S. However, the popularity of salvias across the country and beyond has made it common in states as far from the south as Oregon. This expansion has resulted in its classification as an invasive species in Japan.

In Georgia, various native sages, including scarlet, blue, and lyreleaf, provide abundant habitat for this species.

Sources:
- Nurture Native Nature
- Insect Identification for the Casual Observer
- Oregon State Univeristy

Symbolic Migration

Continued from page 5

The new Ambassador template introduced last year.

While delivering your awesome Ambassadors, the Symbolic Monarch Migration increases the knowledge of our local students with additional, unfamiliar, and surprising aspects of their local ecosystem and hibernating forests to our resilient monarchs, letting them know how mushrooms, protected animal species, pollinators, moths, water, trees, wild plants, and flowers are all vital components to the exclusive micro-climate and delicate equilibrium monarchs rely on.

This accomplished, our students write and decorate their letters of response fully understanding and proudly showing why their hometown is a unique natural reserve in the world, telling how they inherit, through anecdotes, experiences, and local culture ancestral knowledge from their grandparents of which they shall be proud heirs as they learn how to be the best Ejidatarios and guardians of these unique fir forests in the world.

Educational Legacy

Contributing to the education of two generations now, local Mexican grandparents and parents who received their lessons on conservation and paper Ambassador butterflies nearly 30 years ago, bring up and transmit to their children today how they as local families impact monarchs' habitat directly.

Book Donation

MAG's Mexico Book Project is a separate and main complement program to the Symbolic Monarch Migration exchange bringing hundreds of books and didactic materials on nature conservation thanks to generous donations that enrich the libraries of our rural schools in the mountains.

Participation Thanks

The Symbolic Monarch Migration is now reaching its 30th anniversary as the only educational program delivering lessons on conservation each winter, reaching about 40 local schools and over 2,000 students scattered throughout monarchs' overwintering reserve in México.

Most of our schools do not have internet or computers, so all didactic material and each Ambassador paper butterfly mean an encouraging, inspiring, and invaluable sign of friendship, connection, and awareness of this tri-national commitment and sistership across borders and generations for the assurance of the vital natural cycle of our extraordinary, resilient creatures.

Your participation in the Symbolic Monarch Migration Project and donations to the Monarchs Across Georgia México Book Project provide invaluable resources for our youth.

MAG's Susan Meyers Receives Dr. Eugene Odum Lifetime Service Award from EEA

We are delighted to announce that Susan Meyers was awarded the Dr. Eugene Odum Lifetime Service Award at the 2025 Environmental Education Alliance (EEA) Conference.

Susan has been an active EEA board member since 2002, serving in many capacities. She is known for her dedication to MAG and her annual trips to Mexico to observe the overwintering monarch butterfly colonies.

Award criteria:

- Must be an active EEA member with at least five years of membership
- Must have made a significant contribution to environmental education (EE)
- Should be known for one or more of the following:
  - Leadership contributions to the field of EE in addition to contributions emanating directly from either salaried duties or in a volunteer capacity
  - Clear recognition of overall contributions among EE colleagues and within EEA
  - Served at least 15 years in the field of EE

When to Cut Back Dormant Plants in Your Garden

Adapted from the Izel Native Plants Blog

Maybe you've seen neighbors cutting back before winter and wonder if that's what's recommended. Or perhaps you've learned about stem-nesting bees and are worried that if you cut back at the wrong time, you'll inadvertently execute the tiny larvae you're lovingly hosting.

Gardeners are often uncertain about the appropriate timing for pruning dormant plants in preparation for the upcoming growing season. This uncertainty is largely influenced by evolving gardening practices and shifting priorities.

Traditionally, gardeners would trim herbaceous perennials and grasses in the fall, once they had entered dormancy, to maintain a neat appearance in the landscape. However, it's become increasingly popular to leave dormant plants intact throughout the winter, as many have begun to recognize their distinctive beauty and the importance of providing habitat for wildlife.

When using a push mower to cut back, being efficient with your passes helps reduce foot traffic and minimize soil compaction. Photo by Brie Arthur.

Why Do You Want to Prune?

The timing and method of pruning are closely aligned with your objectives for your landscape. Certain circumstances necessitate early pruning, while others may require a later approach.

- In cases where a garden is afflicted by significant diseases or insect infestations, such as powdery mildew or leaf miners, it's beneficial to prune and remove affected foliage before winter to mitigate further spread.
- For many gardeners, pruning plants in the fall after they have entered dormancy provides a sense of accomplishment. This act of tidying up not only enhances the garden's appearance but also indicates that it is receiving proper care. Additionally, community standards often promote such maintenance, with homeowner's associations frequently encouraging or mandating it.
- Conversely, the unique aesthetic appeal of perennial forbs and grasses during their dormant phase can be diminished if they are pruned in the fall. Striking seedheads from plants like *Vernonia*, *Eryngium*, *Eupatorium*, and *Monarda* offer captivating silhouettes against the winter light. The presence of these seedheads and the gentle movement of grasses enrich the winter landscape, providing both visual interest and structural integrity during the quieter months. Even for backyard gardens, leaving a small area "messy" could help give structure in all seasons.
- Maintaining grasses and multi-stemmed forbs during winter contributes to reducing erosion and improving water quality. Even in their dormant state, the crowns of these plants continue to slow down and filter stormwater. The thick, enduring foliage of grasses plays a crucial role in capturing rainfall prior to ground impact, thereby dispersing its force and reducing speed.

Planning for Wildlife

To support wildlife habitats effectively, it's best to retain dormant plants throughout the winter. Wildlife management decisions are based on the goals for the landscape, the scale of the site, and the species to be supported.

Supporting Birds and Small Mammals. Dr. Chris Moorman, conservation biologist at North Carolina State University, has the following recommendations to support birds and small mammals:

- Delay cutback until late winter or early spring – Delaying the cutback maximizes support and cover for wildlife over the winter when foliage and other plant cover is at its lowest.
- Leave dead portions of herbaceous stems – There is no downside to leaving dead portions of herbaceous stems. Removal is needed only in case of substantial thatch accumulation that suffocates the seedbank or restricts ground-level access for wildlife.
- Cut back in a graduated approach – Cutback over several acres causes greater impacts. Therefore, removals at a small scale are better. One solution is to cut back some areas early and proceed to others as late

See, "Pruning Tips," on page 9

Pruning Tips

Continued from page 8

as possible. Additionally, cutting some areas and leaving others standing, aso prevents greater impacts, along with a rotation of the areas cutback and left as-is.

Many bird species feed on the seeds of grasses and forbs, such as *Helianthus* spp. (sunflowers), *Symphyotrichum* spp. (asters), Solidago spp. (goldenrod), *Liastris* spp. (blazing stars), and *Eutrochium* spp. (Joe-Pye weed). To support these natural feeders that typically retain their seedheads, it's advisable to leave them intact throughout the winter if the goal is to provide sustenance for wildlife.

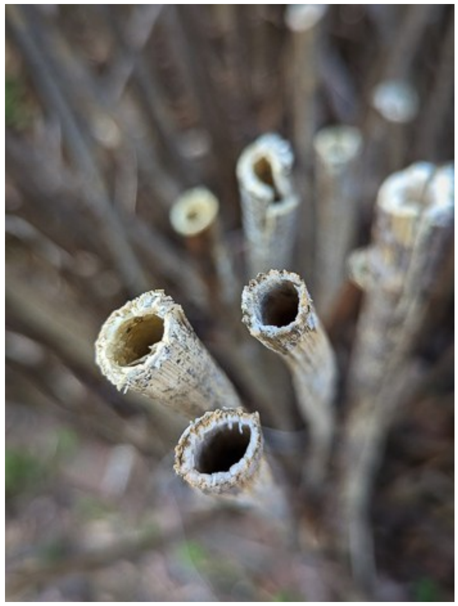
Small birds and mammals most commonly use grass as nesting sites in the Midwest Prairie habitats. Cutbacks in late winter or early spring also avert the risk of disturbing species that make nests in the spring. Retaining the cut foliage and stems in the vicinity also offers valuable materials for nest building.

Knowing which birds and mammals are making their home in your space can help determine the best timing for cutback and any clearing you want to do. It is important to note that bird nests found early in the spring tend to belong to non-migratory residents, while migrants return and breed later in the spring and summer.

Bird species in southern regions generally make nests earlier than their northern counterparts.

Supporting Insect Habitat. Pollinators and beneficial insects need shelter for nesting and overwintering. Cavity-nesting insects rely on the availability of hollow or pithy branches and stems.

The Xerces Society recommends leaving flower stalks and canes intact over the winter to provide nesting sites. They suggest cutting back the previous season's stems in early spring, which opens nesting sites shortly before the first bees start flying.



Pithy or hollow stems, like these of Eutrochium fistulosum (hollow Joe-Pye weed), provide critical habitat for cavity-nesting insects. Photo: Izel Native Plants

"All parts of a plant can be valuable to insects, even after they have withered and browned and become less aesthetically pleasing to us. Remembering this can really go a long way in helping insects find what they need in our yards to make their homes."
— Xerces Society

During spring clean-up, it's essential to retain the cut stems from the previous spring. According to the Xerces Society, these stems may be housing insect larvae, pupae, or overwintering adults.

Tips on Pruning and Debris Management

- Pruning plants to heights varying between 8 and 24 inches creates diverse nesting environments for insects of different sizes. It's essential to make cuts at least 4 to 6 inches away from branch or stem nodes to ensure the formation of adequate cavities for nesting.
- For grasses that exhibit arching or clumping growth patterns, retaining a "skirt" of untrimmed foliage at the base is advantageous. This layer of cover can serve as a suitable nesting site for bumblebees and provide shelter for smaller wildlife. It also helps mitigate sunlight exposure and competition from early-spring weeds.
- Leaving cut plant debris on the ground or assembling it into brush piles fosters habitat creation. According to the Xerces Society, approximately 30% of native bees use cavities found in dead wood, hollow stems, or brush piles for nesting. Other beneficial insects, such as butterflies, moths, and fireflies, also seek refuge in leaf litter and brush piles.

Tools and Techniques

The best tools depend on the plant mix and scale of cutback. For example, cutback of small plantings can be done with pruners. Many gardeners find that manual or electric hedge trimmers enable them to control the height of pruning and provide varied plant structure. String trimmers can also work well, but they can get tangled up in long, narrow foliage such as taller grasses or plants with very fibrous stems.

Mowing serves as an effective option, particularly for larger areas. It's advisable to adjust the mower to its highest setting, typically around 5 inches for most push mowers. When operating a mower, it's crucial to ensure that it can navigate above the growing points of the plants being mowed, which are generally located at or beneath the soil surface.

Certain grasses, particularly larger warm -season varieties, may have a rounded, dome-like crown shape. Mowing too low can damage these crowns and harm the central growing points. Exercise

See, "Timing Your Cuts," on page 10

Timing Your Cuts

Continued from page 9

discretion when mowing, as grasses with prominent or elevated crowns, along with some robust forbs that are too resilient for a push mower, may require manual cutting. Opting for smaller, lighter mowers also can minimize soil compaction and thereby support soil health.

Cutback in Fall

When pruning in the fall, it's essential to ensure that the plants have entered a state of complete dormancy. Pruning too early, while the plants are still in active growth, can lead to the development of new shoots. This new growth depletes the reserves meant for the upcoming growing season, potentially weakening the plant. Furthermore, any new growth may be susceptible to frost, which can diminish the plant's likelihood of thriving in the subsequent year.

It's important to exercise caution when pruning to avoid cutting too closely. Tracy DiSabato-Aust, author of *The Well-Tended Perennial Garden*, notes certain plants may sustain winter damage, as some have overwintering buds located at or just beneath the soil surface. She recommends leaving at least 2-3 inches to protect these buds. In regions with colder climates, she advises gardeners to retain approximately 6 inches of stem to facilitate snow accumulation, which serves as insulation.

Certain herbaceous plants may not thrive when pruned in the fall. Moisture can accumulate in their crowns, making them susceptible to freezing and heaving. The Chicago Botanic Garden explains that heaving occurs due to temperature fluctuations in winter, which leads to repeated freezing and thawing of the soil, causing some plants to be pushed out of the ground and exposing their roots to harsh conditions, particularly in areas lacking snow cover. Shallow-rooted species such as *Tiarella* spp. (foamflower) and *Heuchera* (alumroot) are at risk of frost heaving if pruned prematurely. Some asters also do not respond well to early cutbacks, while *Coreopsis* (tickseed) benefits from remaining undisturbed until spring.

If unsure about how close to the ground to cut, better to err on the side of leaving more stem rather than less. Photo: Izel Native Plants

Warm-season grasses like *Panicum* (switchgrass) face increased risk of winter damage when cut back too soon. Their hollow stems can trap water in the crown, leading to freezing and diminished overwintering resilience. *Muhlenbergia capillaris* is especially vulnerable during wet winters if pruned in the fall. It's advisable to leave most warm-season grasses unpruned until spring to ensure their health. In contrast, cool-season grasses are generally less affected by cutbacks, but as they often display attractive colors in late fall and winter, it can be visually appealing to leave them standing.

When dealing with issues related to diseases or insect pests, it's essential to understand their life cycles. This knowledge will help determine whether cutting back the affected plants will be an effective management strategy.

Post-Winter Cutback

The optimal time to prune plants is just before the onset of new growth. The specific timing is contingent upon when the plant exits its dormant phase. Pruning is more manageable when there is minimal new foliage obstructing the process. Fortunately, if some new growth is inadvertently removed, most forbs tend to recover well, although care should be taken to avoid severing flower buds on spring-blooming species.

Grasses exhibit less tolerance to cutting than forbs. When the tips of grass blades are trimmed, they don't regenerate and will remain blunt at the cut point. Grasses have unique growth points, known as intercalary meristems, which facilitate elongation between the nodes rather than from the tip. This adaptation is partly an evolutionary response to grazing, enabling the plant to continue growing even after intermittent grazing. The same is true for grasses if their tips are cut as they emerge in the spring; any tips that are cut will remain blunt and will not regrow to their original form.

Cool-season grasses, such as *Deschampsia cespitosa*, and *Carex* (sedges) typically emerge from dormancy early, making late winter or early spring an ideal time for cutting back. In contrast, warm-season grasses such as species like *Schizachyrium*, *Panicum*, and *Muhlenbergia*, tend to break dormancy later, coinciding with warmer soil and air temperatures. Although it's possible to prune these grasses earlier, waiting until mid-spring is generally acceptable.

See, "Finding Balance," on page 11

Pollinator Habitat Certification

Do you enjoy seeing caterpillars on their host plants, how about searching for hidden chrysalides, or maybe just watching butterflies and hummingbirds flit from flower to flower?

Does your schoolyard, workplace, or backyard have bushes, trees, and flowers that provide host plants, nectar, and protection for pollinators? Is there a source of water or puddling areas for thirsty butterflies? Are there any places for them to roost at night?

If you answered yes to many or most of these questions, consider registering your habitat with MAG's Pollinator Habitat Program. No garden is too big or too small!

Congratulations to MAG's latest certified garden:

- Cathi Stroud - Canton, GA

Finding Balance

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Finding a Balance

It's best to base your decision of cutback on your current stage in gardening. There are valid reasons for selecting various timings and methods for pruning forbs and grasses. Many gardeners have multiple objectives, which often involve compromises. For instance, while you may wish to retain certain species through winter to provide food for birds, you might also consider trimming them in the fall to control their proliferation.

Fortunately, the process of cutting back is flexible rather than absolute. Uli Lorimer, director of horticulture for the Native Plant Trust, advocates for cultivating abundance and diversity in our gardens. This philosophy—promoting a broad array of native species in substantial quantities—allows for the retention of plants that significantly benefit wildlife while enabling the early pruning of those that are less beneficial or invasive. If wildlife support is your priority, you can maintain most plants throughout winter and employ techniques like mowed edges for a tidy appearance.

Conversely, if neatness is essential, selective pruning can achieve both aesthetic appeal and wildlife support, such as trimming sprawling wildflowers in visible areas while leaving others intact in less prominent spots.

Perspectives on garden maintenance are evolving, with a rising preference for naturalistic plantings. Nonetheless, maintaining a landscape that conveys a sense of care and purpose continues to hold significance. Gardeners often face constraints regarding the timing of their maintenance activities, which may be influenced by labor availability or personal capacity.

It's essential to consolidate our objectives, priorities, limitations, and understanding of the plant species within our environment to achieve a harmonious balance. By doing so, we can effectively navigate the challenges of garden upkeep while embracing a more naturalistic approach.

Leaving these grasses up through winter offers visual delights while providing food, shelter, and cover for birds and other creatures. It's a beautiful balance of aesthetics and wildlife support. Photo: Sarah P. Duke Gardens © Annabel Renwick

About the author: Shannon Currey is a horticultural educator with Izel Native Plants. She's worked in the nursery trade since 2006, developing expertise in grasses and sedges and expanding her knowledge of native forbs. She currently serves on the North Carolina Plant Conservation Program Scientific Committee, holds advisory roles with several organizations, and served on board of the Perennial Plant Association. She lives in Durham, NC.

Proposed Listing

Continued from page 3

minimize and mitigate primary threats. The proposal also underscores the critical need for monarch conservation, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between public and private sectors.

How Would a Final Rule Impact People and Landowners?

Currently, there are no new regulatory requirements associated with the proposed listing. If finalized, routine activities such as conservation land management, agricultural production, and gardening may be exempt under the proposed 4(d) rule. Landowners can participate in existing programs that support monarch-friendly practices, such as planting milkweed or managing land for pollinators.

ESA funding is not specific to each individual listed species. If the proposal becomes law, existing ESA funding support mechanisms would include monarch conservation activities in addition to those of previously listed species. Listing also would provide opportunities for individuals, schools, businesses, and local governments to engage in conservation through habitat creation and advocacy.

What Can People Do to Support Monarch Conservation?

- Provide feedback, raise inquiries, or voice concerns regarding the proposed listing and regulations through the public comment process.
- Plant milkweed and nectar-rich native plants to support monarchs.
- Reduce pesticide use and unnecessary land management activities. Follow integrated pest management strategies that protect pollinators.
- Engage with conservation organizations to restore monarch-friendly landscapes and support conservation efforts.
- Contribute to community science projects like the Monarch Larva Monitoring Project, Monarch Watch, Project Monarch Health, Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program, or Journey North to help track monarch populations and migration patterns. Seek out more information and opportunities.

What Doesn't the Proposed ESA Listing Do?

This proposal is still under review, and no new restrictions are in place until a final decision is made one year from the proposal. Private landowners would not face new restrictions unless federal actions, permits, or funding are involved. Even if finalized, the listing is just one tool among many needed to address broader issues like climate change and large-scale habitat loss.

Next Steps in the ESA Process

USFWS will analyze comments, scientific data, and economic analyses submitted during the comment period and public hearings. After review, the agency will issue a final determination on whether to list the monarch as threatened, endangered, or not warranted, and if listed, what the regulatory actions will be. If substantial changes to the proposal are warranted, USFWS may re-propose the ruling for additional review and comments.

Once a final determination is made, a recovery plan is developed and protections are put in place, typically within 30-60 days of the final rule.

Call for Committee Volunteers

If you're interested in becoming a volunteer with the Monarchs Across Georgia (MAG) committee, please email mag@eealliance.org and let us know what volunteer opportunities interest you.

Here are some of the many ways you could help:

- Write newsletter articles
- Help facilitate MAG workshops
- Review grant applications
- Join our speakers bureau
- Update our web pages and/or Facebook page
- Help at a MAG event (answer questions or assist with a children's craft activity)
- Become an active committee member and coordinate or work on a project, such as…
  - Grant administration
  - Chrysalis newsletter, e-blast/email list
  - Symbolic Monarch Migration
  - Mexico Book Project
  - Plant sales
  - Pollinator habitat certification
  - Volunteer coordination