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Have fun and learn how to help an iconic butterfly at the Iowa City Monarch Festival

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Iowa City Monarch Festival

Iowa City Municipal Airport – Sunday, Aug. 25, 10 a.m. to noon



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The fourth annual [Iowa City Monarch Festival](#) on Sunday is a celebration with a purpose. The two-hour event at the Iowa City Municipal Airport not only gives people a chance to enjoy monarch butterflies—as well as family-friendly crafts and snacks—but also learn what they can do to help the icon butterfly.

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The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#) currently classifies the monarch as “threatened,” and is considering whether it should receive special protection under the Endangered Species Act. The [National Wildlife Foundation](#) estimates monarch populations have declined by approximately 90 percent since the 1990s.



Monarchs rely heavily on one plant: milkweed. It's the only plant monarchs lay their eggs on, and it's the only plant monarch caterpillars eat. The festival will have feature information about raising milkweed to provide a habitat for monarchs, and provide free seeds to anyone who wants to plant a monarch-friendly patch.

"Little patches can sustain monarchs...and it helps that it's local. People can compare notes about what's going on," said Dr. Tammy Mildenstein, an assistant professor of biology at Cornell College. Since 2016, Mildenstein and a

group of her students have been studying monarchs and the milkweed in Iowa City's Waterworks Prairie Park.

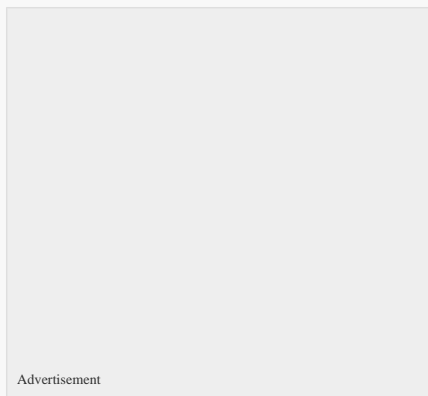
Monarch caterpillars have been observed feeding on only 20 percent of the milkweed in the park, Mildenstein told *Little Village*. She estimates that approximately five percent of the caterpillars in the park survive and mature into butterflies.

Mildenstein also said that roughly 90 percent of milkweed plants don't survive to the end of the growing season.

In Iowa, more than 80 percent of the land is devoted to agriculture, and [a study](#) prepared by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Center for Food Safety and the Xerces Society found that the state's croplands had "lost 98.7 percent of its milkweed from 1999 to 2012." The study suggests the chemicals typically used in large-scale corn and soybean production are responsible for the loss of milkweed.

A new approach to agriculture being pioneered through Iowa State University's [Science-Based Trials of Rowcrops Integrated with Prairie Strips](#) program, can reverse that loss. The program encourages farmers to plant 10 percent of their fields with buffer strips of native prairie vegetation. Planting the prairie strips has been shown to decrease soil by 95 percent decrease in soil loss. It also provides a 44 percent reduction in water runoff on the fields, as well as runoff reductions of 90 percent in phosphorus and 84 percent in nitrogen.

The prairie strips also provide a habitat for native fauna, leading to rebounds in populations of birds, bees and butterflies. Since milkweed is typically one of the plants in prairie strips, monarchs are also benefitting.



In recent years, Iowa City has also been making efforts to help the monarch. Way stations for the butterflies have been set up at the Eastside Recycling Center, Hickory Hill Park, Hunter's Run Park and Wetherby Park. Each station provides free milkweed to those interested in raising monarchs.

This year's festival is being held as part of the Iowa City Optimist Club's Annual Pancake Breakfast, which runs from 7 a.m. to noon. For those interested in something more mechanical than monarch butterflies, the breakfast will also

feature a display of classic cars and various aircraft.

Curious what's happening this weekend? [Sign up here](#) to stay in the know.

The Iowa City Monarch Festival starts at 10 a.m., and is free and open to the public.



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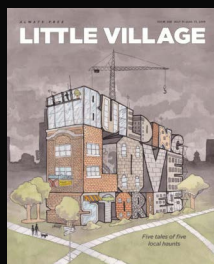


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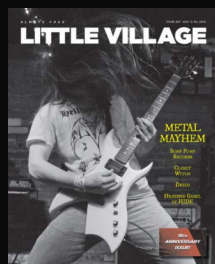
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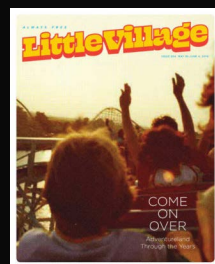
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