

# Fall Flowers for Monarch Butterflies

NOV 1999 by Joan Sargent

I went to a meeting of the Connecticut Butterfly Association at the New Canaan Nature Center this summer. Their statistics of disappearing varieties were quite disheartening but they did have some good reminders of what we as gardeners could do to help. I had more or less forgotten about the importance of having a lot of what the Monarchs like planted together instead of a bit here and there.

Perennial Asters do take up a lot of room, look ghastly most of the summer, and are nibbled by both deer and rabbits. This is not a bad thing because it saves you cutting them back in June which keeps them at a reasonable height. They are reputed to need dividing and feeding often, I do neither and unless you cut them short, are not the best cut flowers.

But in late September, when the Monarch comes in flocks, there is nowhere they would rather land than on the bright-colored platforms of the Asters.

The larger flowered, taller ones are the best. You can get them in shades of pinks and violets. I have had 20 Monarchs on one clump and you can get up so close to them that they make a wonderful learning lesson for kids and parents alike. The Swallowtails you see earlier in the summer are not so tolerant. They vie with bees and wasps for the best flowers of them all. Like all butterfly plants, they do need sun and a spot out of the wind.

Other fall bloomers that attract Monarchs are Eupatorium, I like the variety 'Chocolate', with dark foliage and Ageratum-like white flowers in bunches of bloom. Japanese Anemones and Sedums all look well in a fall collection and a newer variety of annual Cosmos 'Versailles', late blooming, tall and with large vivid red flat flower was well received. Putting all these in one area works better than mixing them with earlier flowers.

If you are interested in getting started with Asters, Heronswood Nursery [heronswood.com] is a good mail order source. If you know someone with a good supply, they should be delighted to give you a shovel full of roots to get you started in the spring. I know I would.

*Joan Sargent, a longtime member and master gardener who passed away in August 2012; wrote about 24 gardening columns through the years for our newsletter. We are reprinting them again.*

*Clockwise from top right:*

- Fall Aster 'Purple Dome'
- Sedum 'Autumn Joy'
- Eupatorium 'Chocolate' commonly known as Snakeroot
- Anemone hupehensis
- Cosmos 'Purple-Red-White' from Swallowtail Nursery

