**Calvin Finch Ph.D.**

**Horticulturist and Director**

**Texas A&M Water Conservation and Technology Center**

**“Doing your Part for the Monarchs”**

Monarch butterflies are a favorite part of area landscapes. The beautiful insects visit spring and fall blooms such as zinnia, lantana, cosmos and duranta. It is disturbing to hear the reports that Monarch numbers were greatly reduced at their wintering grounds. We are not sure why, but habitat reduction, pesticide use and especially the weather probably share the blame.

The same reports that provided the reduced counts on the wintering grounds give us hope that populations can increase if rains increase this year. The rains will contribute to more blooms for nectar along the migration routes north. The reports also encourage gardeners along the way to plant more flowers as nectar sources.

In addition to planting more flowers, we can encourage Monarchs to breed by providing Asclepias in our landscapes. Asclepias is also called milkweed or butterfly weed. This genus of plant is the only source of food for growing Monarch caterpillars and the only place where they will lay their eggs.

There are a number of native milkweeds and several exotic versions with showier orange flowers available at area nurseries. Plant three or four of them in full or partial sun and you can contribute to the speedy restoration of the Monarch population, at least what is due to the drought across its range.

Don’t be surprised if your favorite nursery is temporarily out of milkweed as area gardeners attempt to do their part and add butterfly weed to their own landscape. There will be more.

**“Landscape Tasks”**

It is time to fertilize your lawn. The grass should be growing and will be capable of taking up nitrogen and other nutrients from the fertilizer; 19-5-9 slow release fertilizer is a good formula.

The air and soil temperatures are warm enough to plant Bermuda grass seed.

Plant zinnias, Cora vinca, cosmos, moss roses and purslane in the full sun garden, then plant begonias, caladiums and coleus in the shade gardens.

Control stink bugs on tomatoes, peaches, blackberries and other fruits with carbaryl. They are tough to control and make fruit unpleasant to eat.