

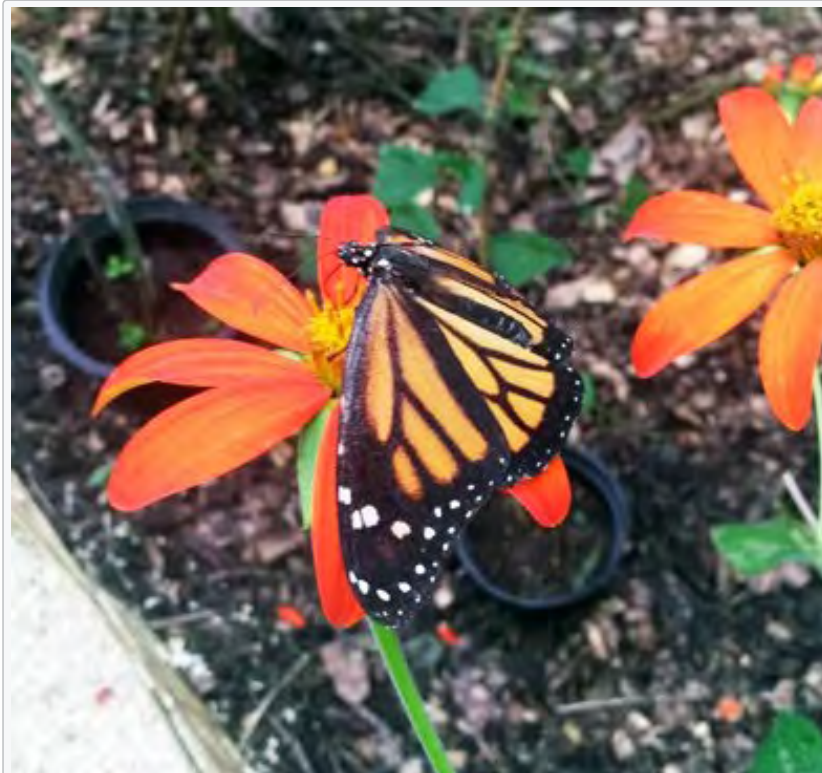


United States Department of Agriculture

## [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#)

# Not All Monarchs Migrate! The Puerto Rican Subspecies Stays Put

Posted by [Julie Wright, Caribbean Area Acting Public Affairs Specialist](#) on June 23, 2016 at 01:08 PM



A Puerto Rican monarch butterfly in a garden at the University of Puerto Rico's Utuado butterfly house.

The monarch butterfly is the iconic butterfly native of the Americas. The black-and-orange butterfly can migrate thousands of miles each year from North America and South America to Mexico. But the subspecies in Puerto Rico, *Danaus plexippus portorricensis*, is considered non-migrant. It likes to stay put!

The Puerto Rican monarch butterfly was identified in 1941 as a separate subspecies. It has also been found in the Virgin Islands, Cuba, the Cayman Islands, St. Lucia and Jamaica.

The adult Puerto Rican monarch grows up to 40 millimeters in size, and there are few differences to distinguish between the sexes. Like the monarch, the Puerto Rican monarch is particular about its host plants. Monarch butterflies depend on milkweed to lay their eggs, and the plant provides the only food source for monarch caterpillars.

The Puerto Rican monarch's primary host plants are red milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*), which is native to North and South America, and giant milkweed (*Calotropis procera*), which is native to Europe. Caterpillars need to feed on milkweed to complete their life cycle, and adult butterflies need the right nectar-producing plants in bloom for needed energy.



Just like its cousins, Puerto Rican monarch populations have declined significantly over the past 20 years, partly because of the loss of plants that it depends upon to survive.

USDA's [Natural Resources Conservation Service](#) (NRCS) is working with farmers in Puerto Rico to include milkweed and other high-nectar wildflowers and warm-season grasses in their working lands. For example, farmers can include those plants in conservation buffers, field borders, pasture plantings and other places on the farm. Through many different conservation practices, farmers are helping the monarch butterfly and many other pollinators.

Farmers, ranchers and forest landowners across the country are helping monarchs and other pollinators by making conservation improvements to their working lands. NRCS offers technical and financial assistance to help landowners plant milkweed, wildflowers, shrubs and warm-season grasses to help a variety of pollinators. Additionally, NRCS also has a targeted effort in the Midwest and southern Great Plains – the heart of the butterfly's largest population's migration route – to help accelerate monarch-friendly conservation practices.

For more information, visit [nrcs.usda.gov/monarchs](https://nrcs.usda.gov/monarchs) or visit your [local NRCS field office](#).