



## Henderson County Master Gardeners Weekly News Article      November 05, 2018

### Butterflies on the Move

By Lydia Holley

It is not often easy for a gardener to look past the chores that need to be done. Occasionally, though, nature's magic is so overwhelmingly mesmerizing, even the gardener is hypnotized. This past week, I fell under nature's spell as I turned my back on encroaching weeds and sat on a bench to gaze at the display in my garden. Dozens of butterflies gathered nectar from the abundant blooms of lantana, Texas rock rose (*Pavonia*), salvia, and a few other plants tricked into blooming by the lingering golden days of autumn; days as soft and warm as a cashmere throw.



Pictured: gulf fritillary butterfly

The monarch is not the only butterfly that migrates. Migrating butterflies commonly seen in Texas include: cloudless sulfur, common buckeye, gulf fritillary, mourning cloak, painted lady, red admiral and question mark. They migrate varying distances, some whose journeys are just now being discovered. The painted lady butterfly's migration from Europe across the Sahara to southern Africa is a round trip of almost 7,500 miles. This distance is more than double the monarch's migration across North America into Mexico. Like the monarch's journey, most of the time this trip is made in multi-generations. Incredibly, however, they have found some painted lady butterflies that have made the entire trip individually. It is also thought painted lady butterflies may travel all the way to the Arctic Circle, a 9,000 mile journey.

Much of what we know about butterfly migration comes from the study of monarchs. The change of the seasons and the shorter days compel the monarchs in North America to leave their summer habitat to migrate south. This particular generation naturally puts off reproduction until spring. It is thought that a pause in hormones allows this to happen. The lack of hormones increases longevity, allowing this generation to live up to eight months instead of the normal life expectancy of a few weeks. The human equivalent would be someone living over 400 years.

If you grow tropical milkweed (*Asclepias curassavica*), research has shown that growing this milkweed in non-native areas are affecting the monarchs with fatal consequences. The presence of this milkweed, native to more tropical areas, slows or stops their migration. It may also contribute to parasitic infections. If you grow tropical milkweed, it is recommended you cut it back in early fall so the monarchs will stay on their natural course of migration.

We are just now learning the mysteries of these miniature creatures. Help them out by planting a butterfly garden of your own. Or find one to enjoy - thanks to the Gun Barrel City Beautification Committee, the public has a new butterfly garden where everyone can see these small but mighty creatures.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email [hendersonCMGA@gmail.com](mailto:hendersonCMGA@gmail.com), or visit [txmg.org/hendersonmg](http://txmg.org/hendersonmg).