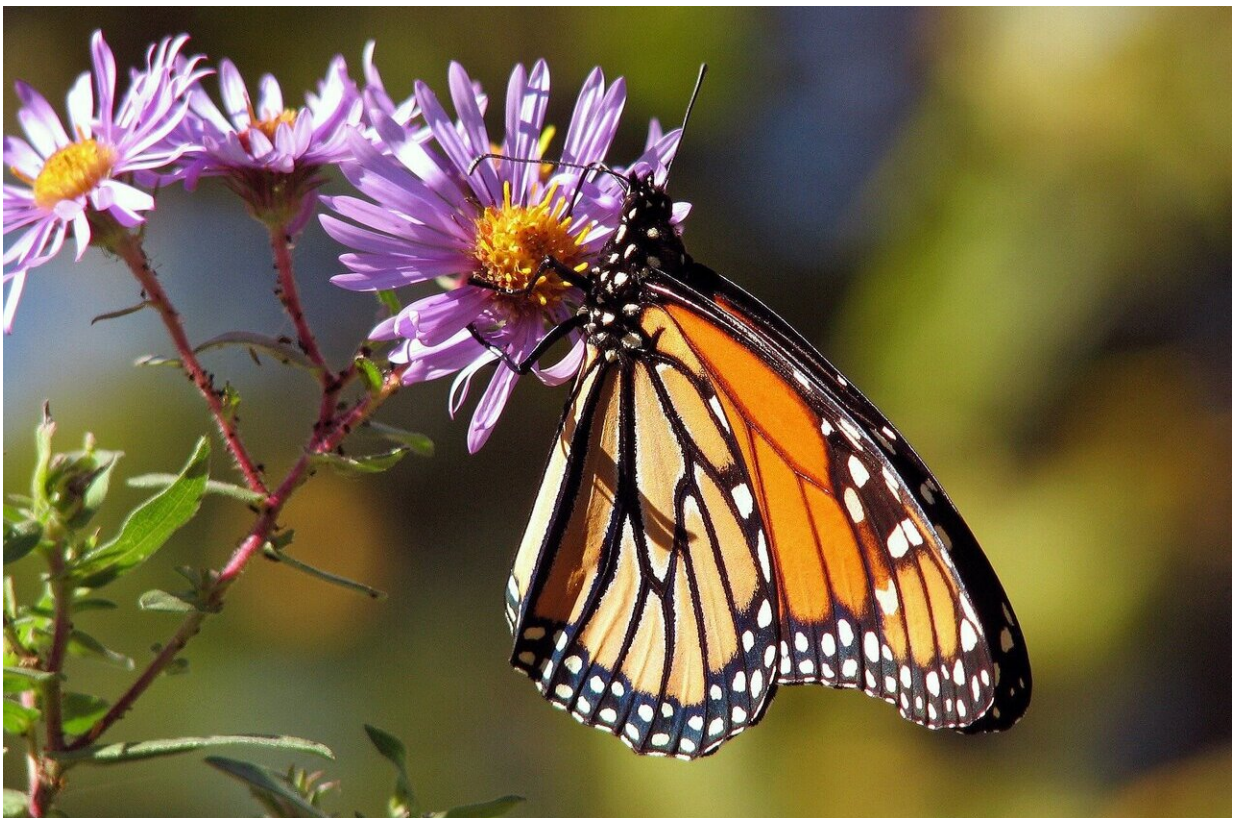


Chicago family creates sanctuaries for monarch butterflies, identified by global group as an endangered species

July 25 2022, by Laura Rodríguez Presa



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More than a dozen images of butterflies adorn the front of Claudia Galeno-Sanchez's home in the Pilsen neighborhood. There are monarch

butterflies spreading their wings and many other colorful ones sprinkled in between. The small house stands out from the tall buildings on the block.

It is filled with [milkweed plants](#) and other flowers that have helped raise monarchs for nearly five years. Galeno-Sanchez and her husband and two children decided to create a butterfly sanctuary after learning that they could help raise and preserve the beloved species in the city.

Though Galeno-Sanchez knew [monarch butterflies](#) were in danger, she began to sob when she learned that the International Union for the Conservation of Nature added the migrating monarch to its "red list" of threatened species and categorized it as "endangered"—two steps from extinct.

"They remind me of my childhood," she said, with her voice breaking. "It pains me that my children may not get to see and experience their beauty. They are like a miracle."

Every year, flocks of the iconic monarch butterfly migrate north after wintering in the mountains of central Mexico. Then they travel to southern Canada before making their way back to Mexico at the end of the summer.

According to the group, the population of the insect in North America has declined between 22% and 72% over 10 years, depending on the measurement method. But despite the steep decline in the last decade, the United States has not listed the butterflies under the Endangered Species Act.

"We must do what we can to preserve the butterflies," said Galeno-Sanchez. The native of Puebla, Mexico, grew up around the majestic black and orange insect. For her, the butterflies represent the beauty of

migration and family.

Helping to raise awareness of how other families in the Chicago area can also help to save the monarchs has become a priority in Galeno-Sanchez's life. What began as a family project blossomed into a solid group led by women in the community that educates and encourages others to create butterfly gardens in their homes by hosting informative workshops about the insects and giving away milkweeds—a plant that the caterpillars depend upon.

She named the group Women for Green Spaces, and since its creation in 2021, Galeno-Sanchez has partnered with several other butterfly lovers and organizations in the area to create gardens to benefit pollinators. This summer, the group created a milkweed garden at Orozco Community Academy and another one at Whittier Dual Language School.

With the news that the butterfly is now endangered, she said she's committed to expand their work by partnering with Chicago Public Schools to use their spaces to plant milkweed and create butterfly gardens in the city.

The group was solidified as a branch of the Working Family Solidarity, an organization that works with working-class communities to encourage policy change for just work environments.

"It is one of our biggest projects: fighting for equitable development in terms of all families in all neighborhoods having access to [green spaces](#), including the propagation of 'mariposarios'—butterfly sanctuaries—to help save one of our most important pollinators," said the [executive director](#), Leone Jose Bicchieri.

The group receives funding to host workshops and other activities from

Enrique E. Figueroa's Gente Chicana/SOYmos Chicanos Art Fund at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. And some of their main partners include the Field Museum and the Chicago Botanic Garden. The two donate the plants that Galeno-Sanchez then distributes to those who visit their sanctuary or when the group hosts workshops.

Abigail Derby-Lewis, the director of conservation tools program at the Field Museum said the work that Galeno-Sanchez family is doing to create a habit for monarchs and other pollinators to grow mirrors the work that people have been doing across Mexico, the United States and Canada since learning of the monarchs' endangerment.

"People have such a deep love for this species and there's a lot happening in the ground that needs to continue," Derby-Lewis said.

The Field Museum has also provided Galeano with education resources and has connected the group to a broader network to linkages for monarch conservation.

Derby-Lewis said the recent report by the IUCN underscores and elevates the work that needs to be done to save the monarchs.

In 2015, Derby-Lewis led a project by the museum that concluded that "the collective impact of many of these small actions of putting in milkweed and native flowers and creating this pollinator habitat across these different metropolitan landscapes—like churchyards, school yards, parks and parkways and boulevards—all of those things really add up for monarchs and other pollinators."

Galeno-Sanchez said monarchs are dear to her heart because she can identify with the butterfly because they migrate long distances across countries.

"Just like I did, coming from Mexico. And like so many other Mexican people here," she said. "But the [monarch](#) can cross borders more easily than we can."

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