The Monarch Journey

Understanding the Award Levels



The Monarch Awards
Halton Region Master Gardeners

Starting the Journey

Native Plant Presence & Food Web Support

- ☐ Few native plants are present.
- ☐ Lawn still occupies the majority of the garden space.
- ☐ Non-native, annual or ornamental plants predominate, resulting in limited support for pollinators, butterflies and other wildlife
- ☐ No evidence of keystone plants

Seasonal Bloom & Structural Diversity

- ☐ Most plants bloom during the same season.
- ☐ There is little variety in flower shapes or colour.
- ☐ The garden has mainly one structural layer, such as groundcovers, perennials, shrubs or trees.
- ☐ Few or no native grasses, sedges or rushes are present.

Safe, Considerate & Intentional Planting

- ☐ Plant spacing and placement show limited planning, with considerable overcrowding or unintended gaps.
- ☐ Few areas are organized around shared growing conditions or habitat needs.
- ☐ Invasive or noxious plants dominate significant areas.
- ☐ Some plantings obstruct sightlines or extend into sidewalks or neighbouring properties.

Cultural Practices

- ☐ Purchased, dyed or synthetic mulch is used decoratively without a clear need.
- ☐ Leaves, stems and other plant material are generally removed from the garden.
- ☐ Peat, synthetic fertilizers or considerable amounts of purchased soil are used.
- ☐ The garden depends on municipal water, with no rainwater collection.

Assessed through garden observations and comments in the application.

Caterpillar

Native Plant Presence & Food Web Support

- ☐ Native plants are present, although not established and not yet the majority.
- ☐ Lawn has been reduced and is becoming more like an “area rug” within the garden.
- ☐ Plant choices are beginning to support the food web, although plants for specialist pollinators and butterfly caterpillars remain limited.

Seasonal Bloom & Structural Diversity

- ☐ Blooms extend beyond one season, but seasonal gaps remain—often in spring or fall.
- ☐ There is some variety in flower shapes and colour.
- ☐ 1-3 keystone plant species are present.
- ☐ The garden has some structural layers, but variety is limited.
- ☐ Some native grasses, sedges or rushes are present.

Safe, Considerate & Intentional Planting

- ☐ Plant spacing is generally appropriate, with limited overcrowding or unintended gaps.
- ☐ Some areas are organized around shared growing conditions or particular habitat needs.
- ☐ Invasive or noxious plants occur in some areas and show little evidence of management.
- ☐ Some growth is managed, but occasional sightline or encroachment concerns remain.

Cultural Practices

- ☐ Some purchased mulch is used decoratively rather than for a specific plant need.
- ☐ Some leaves or plant material remain, but most potential habitat is removed.
- ☐ Compost may be used, but peat, synthetic fertilizers or unnecessary purchased soil are still added.
- ☐ Some water-saving practices are used; municipal water remains the main source.

Assessed through garden observations and comments in the application.

Chrysalis

Native Plant Presence & Food Web Support

- ☐ Native plants make up approximately 50–70% of the plants in the garden.
- ☐ Lawn has been considerably reduced and is more like a “runner” through the garden.
- ☐ 4-9 keystone plant species are present.(ie., host plants and plants for specialists pollinators

Seasonal Bloom & Structural Diversity

- ☐ The garden provides continuous bloom across at least three seasons.
- ☐ At least 3 flower shapes (i.e., tubular, daisy-like & bell-shaped) and colours are present
- ☐ Several structural layers are present, but some are limited or loosely connected
- ☐ Several native grasses, sedges or rushes contribute to structure and habitat.

Safe, Considerate & Intentional Planting

- ☐ Plant selection and placement show thoughtful planning and generally follow “right plant, right place.”
- ☐ Multiple areas are organized around growing conditions or habitat needs, as appropriate to the garden’s size.
- ☐ Invasive or noxious plants are limited to a few areas and are being actively managed.
- ☐ Plants are generally contained, sightlines are clear, and minor encroachment is addressed promptly.

Cultural Practices

- ☐ Undyed, natural mulch is used only where appropriate, e.g. for young plants and newly planted trees.
- ☐ Most leaves and plant material remain in the garden, and some stems are left standing.
- ☐ Compost, leaf mould or other organic materials build the soil; peat and synthetic fertilizers are avoided.
- ☐ Captured rainwater or passive collection is used, but municipal watering is still needed during normal summer conditions. No sprinklers.

Assessed through garden observations and comments in the application.

Monarch

Native Plant Presence & Food Web Support

- ☐ Native plants dominate, making up more than 70% of the plants in the garden.
- ☐ Lawn is limited to narrow buffers beside walkways or is used as a pathway through the garden.
- ☐ Plants are intentionally combined in communities that provide food and habitat for a diversity of wildlife.
- ☐ More than 10 keystone plant species are present.

Seasonal Bloom & Structural Diversity

- ☐ Blooms extend (or nectar and pollen resources are available) from spring to late fall
- ☐ Shrubs, trees are present to provide food for birds and other animals (i.e, seeds, berries, twigs)
- ☐ Multiple flower shapes and colours are present.
- ☐ Multiple well-integrated structural layers provide varied habitat.
- ☐ Native grasses, sedges or rushes are well integrated throughout the planting.

Safe, Considerate & Intentional Planting

- ☐ Plant selection, placement and spacing consistently reflect “right plant, right place.”
- ☐ Well-defined habitat areas are integrated as interconnected plant communities.
- ☐ The garden is free of invasive and noxious plants. Note: Invasive trees are managed to prevent spread with plan for removal if possible
- ☐ Clear sightlines and well-contained plantings demonstrate proactive consideration for safety and neighbouring spaces.

Cultural Practices

- ☐ Organic matter such as twigs, stems, leaves, logs, bark are left on-site as natural mulch.
- ☐ Stems are left standing through winter and spring-cut stems remain for at least a year.
- ☐ Peat, synthetic fertilizers and purchased soil are not used.
- ☐ Multiple water-saving and rain-capture methods —including disconnected downspouts where feasible—limit municipal watering to establishing new plants or prolonged drought. No sprinklers.

Assessed through garden observations and comments in the application.

Keep Growing Your Monarch Garden

Every garden is part of a journey. Your award level recognizes the habitat you’re creating.

Use your assessment feedback with this brochure to:

Use this guide with your assessment feedback to:

- ☐ Tick features already in your garden.
- ☐ Choose one or two improvements.
- ☐ Track progress toward the next level.

Your garden may show features of more than one level.

Find definitions in ‘Gardening Terms’ on our website:

https://haltonmastergardeners.com/events/monarch-awards/resources-for-monarch-awards/gardening-terms/



Learn more about the Monarch Awards

https://haltonmastergardeners.com/events/monarch-awards/

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