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PROJECT MILKWEED ORDERS END, WILL RETURN JUNE 2024
130,903 Orders for Milkweed Seed Will Restore Landscapes, Preserve Habitat

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) has halted online orders for free milkweed seed, as part of its *Project Milkweed*, due to overwhelming demand. The new online offering launched in June 2023 as a mail-order resource aimed at restoring landscapes and preserving habitats for monarch butterflies and other pollinator species. Since June, TDOT has taken nearly 131,000 individual orders from Tennesseans for milkweed seed. In total, 779,601 Red and Common Milkweed seed packets were requested. This program will return in June 2024.

“TDOT is happy to offer such a popular program to the public, and to empower Tennesseans to do their part in creating thousands of waystations for monarch butterflies across our State.” said Commissioner Butch Eley.

Through September 30th, orders had been fulfilled exhausting a stock of 300,000 milkweed seed packets. Additional seed material has been ordered and are expected to arrive in October. All remaining orders will be fulfilled at that time. Because of the late delivery, it is recommended to plant the seeds next spring. Specialized instructions will come with all late orders for over-wintering seeds and adding scarification to the seed coat before planting. For more information about *Project Milkweed*, including planting tips, please visit: <https://tnpollinators.org/milkweed/>.

Contrary to its name, milkweed is a flowering plant that serves a critical role as a host plant in the lifecycle of monarch butterflies. Host plants are necessary for the survival and growth of another organism. Milkweed provides a place for monarchs to lay their eggs and serves as food for their larvae and caterpillars. The natural toxins within the milkweed leave build-up in the body of the caterpillar and give the adult butterfly a bitter taste for protection against predators. Both the monarch butterfly population and milkweed habitats have experienced a 90% decline since 1992, and efforts like *Project Milkweed* are critical to restoring these pollinators and host plants.

Project Milkweed is a subset of TDOT’s Pollinator Habitat Program, a partnership between multiple state agencies and nonprofits that aims to conserve native pollinators and pollinator habitats. Pollinators are more diverse than just bees and butterflies and can include birds, bats, beetles, moths, and more. They are important not only for the growth of native wildflowers but also contribute an estimated \$24 billion to the economy by pollinating food crops. Pollinators around the world are experiencing large population declines because of habitat loss, disease, pesticide use, and changing climate.

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