

The **Whitehaven Butterfly Garden** at exit 7 on I-24 in western Kentucky, is on the grounds of the historic Whitehaven rest stop, the only historic house in the United States used as a rest area.

The rest area was opened in 1983, the house was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, but it wasn't until 2015 that the little butterfly garden situated on the property near the truck parking area was established by the Horticulture Committee of the Paducah Garden Club.

In January of 2015, the husband of one of the club members gave a talk to the club entitled 'Monarch Butterflies: Struggles for Survival'. The Horticulture Committee embraced his challenge to expand butterfly habitats, and within 4 months they had secured this 1/8 of an acre, four-quadrant garden that had been abandoned by another garden club, tilled up the two sunny quadrants, made two trips to a native plants' nursery about 2.5 hours away, and planted a mix of Kentucky natives.

This garden proved to be a real tribute to how well native plants adapt. 4 varieties of milkweed, several golden rods and sunflowers, 3 cultivars of coneflowers, bee balm, ironweed, rattlesnake, mist, and Indian plantains continue to reseed themselves every year, but even after a single season, the garden was full and gloriously blooming. It was designated an official Monarch Watch Way Station (#14017) the summer of 2016.

Over the years the initial plants were supplemented with a few natives from members' gardens, and the committee invested more time and energy with the remaining two shady quadrants, replacing the dying Japanese maples with two vitex. Coming out of the COVID shutdown, the Butterfly Garden became its own committee within the club, with its own budget, and its first purchase was an educational 'park' sign

showcasing the life cycle of the monarch butterfly and some of the native plants found in the garden.

Since its inception, the Whitehaven Butterfly Garden has been a beloved space for many reasons. It is a respite for weary travelers who stop at the rest area. One member happened to be there when a busload of Korean tourists stopped, and she had an animated 'sign-language-conversation' about its purpose and beauty. Other members have happened upon truckers having lunch there, families walking their dogs and giving their children a science lesson on the monarch life cycle using the signage. The Garden Club has had meetings there; they showcased it during the 2017 Mayfair Garden Tour; the photography committee has taken award winning photos there. It was a beautiful public place of refuge for many during the COVID shutdown and continues to be a source of solace and pride for the club and the community and the thousands of weary travelers who stop at the visitors' center annually.

Stephanie Young, Dec. 2025