

Normally, I would shudder when you utter its name. The word is WEED. Simply defined, a weed is a plant growing where it is not wanted. We gardeners know there are plenty of them. I have a book titled *Weeds of Nebraska and the Great Plains* with 589 pages full of information about and pictures of assorted weeds. Most gardeners view weeds as bad— plants that need to be destroyed. Today, let's examine the potential good in weeds.

On the evening of July 2, 2015, Rita and I attended a concert on the Kearney County Courthouse square in Minden. A very-talented young man by the name of Daniel Christian, originally from Tecumseh, Nebraska, performed. He is now a renowned Nashville recording artist. His performance for the evening was a mix of humor and music. Prior to performing a song, he would share bits of nostalgia and humor with his audience. Often his humor was projected in his songs. Daniel wrote and performed one particular tune that prompted me to look at weeds in a different light. His song was *Dandelion*. To most people, a dandelion is a weed; however, the lyrics of his song speak differently. I've included a verse of the lyrics.

I am a dandelion but not the weed you're thinking of  
Cause I look like a flower when you see me from above.  
Dandelion... Reaching up to Heaven, following the sun.  
I look like a flower when you see me from above.

Daniel's song quickly reminded me of an email I had received earlier that day. It was from Natalia Bjorklund, a UNL Extension Educator in Horticulture from Dodge County. Natalia's email informed me that she and a colleague from UNL's Entomology Department are working on a project called *Milkweed Watch*. She wanted to know if our office would host a program for the public regarding their project.

Interestingly, I noticed attached to the bottom of Natalia's email a quote from the late Alan Alexander Milne, an English author best known for his books about Winnie-the-Pooh and other children's poems. Milne's quote was, "*Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them.*" So true, I thought, so true.

I called Natalia and agreed to host a program for her and her colleague Louise Lynch. Although this is short notice, I want you to know that you are invited to attend, at no cost, a program on *Milkweed Watch* this coming Monday evening, July 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. in the Buffalo County Extension Building, Room B. I do ask that if you plan to attend, pre-register by calling or emailing Natalia. She can be reached at 402-727-2775 or email her at [natalia.bjorklund@unl.edu](mailto:natalia.bjorklund@unl.edu) By knowing how many will be attending, she will



be better prepared to bring enough handout materials. Please specify that you plan to attend in Kearney, since she will also be presenting in Fremont earlier that day.

Milkweed watch is a citizen science project that seeks to explore and document the diversity of milkweed plants in Nebraska and the animals that use them. Most gardeners know that the milkweed plant is essential in the life of the monarch butterfly. Did you know there are more than 100 different milkweed species in North America and about seventeen species are commonly seen in Nebraska? Numerous insects besides the monarch butterfly utilize milkweed plants to survive.

To gain more insight before joining us Monday evening, perhaps you might wish to log onto their website <http://milkweedwatch.unl.edu> Once there you will find a plethora of information regarding milkweed and the creatures it serves. From there, you can even join the citizen scientist team *Milkweed Watch* helping Natalia and others gather more valuable data about milkweed.

Please join us Monday evening for *Milkweed Watch*, but don't forget to pre-register. I have a hunch that after attending you will view milkweed entirely different. After all, "*Weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them.*"