

# MILKWEED IN THE GARDEN

Milkweed is the *only* food source for Monarch caterpillars.

## **BUTTERFLY MILKWEED** (*Asclepias tuberosa*)

Exposure: Full Sun      Soil: Well-drained  
Bloom time: June-August      Height: 2-3'



## **SWAMP MILKWEED** (*Asclepias incarnata*)

Exposure: Full Sun      Soil: Damp to Medium  
Bloom time: June-August      Height: 3-4'



## **COMMON MILKWEED** (*Asclepias syriaca*)

Exposure: Full Sun      Soil: Dry to Medium  
Bloom time: June-August      Height: 4-6'



## **WHORLED MILKWEED** (*Asclepias verticillata*)

Exposure: Full Sun      Soil: Dry to Medium  
Bloom time: July-September      Height: 1-2'



## **POKE MILKWEED** (*Asclepias exaltata*)

Exposure: Part-sun      Soil: Medium  
Bloom time: June-July      Height: 4-5'



## **TROPICAL MILKWEED** (*Asclepias curassavica*)

Annual in Wisconsin  
Exposure: Full Sun      Soil: Dry to Medium  
Bloom time: June-September      Height: 2-3'



## **SULLIVANT'S MILKWEED** (*Asclepias sullivantii*)

Exposure: Full Sun      Soil: Medium  
Bloom time: June-August      Height: 3-5'



This publication is produced by Master Gardener Volunteers of the University of Wisconsin Extension using university research based information. Contact UW-Extension office in your county for information on other publications and programs.

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## **GROWING MILKWEED FOR MONARCH BUTTERFLIES**

The Monarch butterfly population is in decline. Although population estimates vary each year, Monarchs have declined drastically from their peak population in the 1990's due to several contributing causes. Monarch caterpillars can eat only milkweed and we have lost billions of milkweed plants, mostly to development and elimination as weeds in farm areas, fields, roadways and other spaces. You can help Monarchs by planting milkweed in your yards to start replacing what has been lost and feed hungry caterpillars.

Milkweed can be grown from seed or purchased as container plants. Container plants can be planted any time after the danger of frost has passed. Choose plants that have not been treated with pesticides, insecticides or neonicotinoids. It is important to choose the best milkweed for the garden's size and location.

Milkweed seed can be collected from existing plants or purchased from native plant nurseries. For purchased seeds, follow the planting instructions on the seed packet.

### **GATHERING SEEDS**

Collect seeds when the seed pod turns tan and opens easily. Separate the seed from the "fluff" and store in a paper envelope or paper bag.

### **GROWING PERENNIAL MILKWEED FROM SEED**

The best time to plant seeds is in the late fall (from mid-October until the ground freezes). Planting in the fall allows for natural stratification (cold treatment) so the seeds will germinate the following spring.

Carefully place the seeds in your garden covered with a thin layer of soil (1/4" or less) and water. If waiting for spring to plant, the gathered seeds will need to be stratified. To do this:

- 1) Mix the seeds with moist fine sand.
- 2) Seal the mixture in an airtight container.
- 3) Keep in an unheated garage or refrigerator for 30 to 90 days of cold treatment.

The seeds should be planted in the spring after the danger of frost has passed. The seedlings may not bloom the first year, but the leaves still are a source of food for caterpillars.

### **Resources on Milkweed and Monarch Butterflies:**

- [monarchjointventure.org](http://monarchjointventure.org)
- [monarchwatch.org](http://monarchwatch.org) (University of Kansas)
- <https://monarchlab.org/biology-and-research/monarch-rearing/finding-collecting-and-growing-milkweed/> (University of Minnesota)
- [www.fws.gov/midwest/news/PollinatorGarden.html](http://www.fws.gov/midwest/news/PollinatorGarden.html)
- [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org) (Milkweed Seed Finder/Monarch Conservation)