



MILKWEED USA

The complete field guide

All 72 milkweed species of the United States

72 SPECIES - 50 STATES - FREE TO PRINT AND SHARE

milkweedusa.com

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How to use this guide

Species run alphabetically by common name. Each entry gives the characters you would actually check standing in front of the plant: how the leaves sit on the stem, what shape they are, what color the flowers are, how tall it gets and when it flowers.

READING AN ENTRY

- The strip of twelve cells is the flowering season, January on the left. A darker cell is peak bloom.
- NATIVE and INTRODUCED refer to the United States as a whole. A native species may still be out of place in your particular state.
- Height is the usual mature range. Plants in poor dry ground sit at the bottom of it.
- The county figure is the number of US counties with a USDA PLANTS record. An unshaded county is not evidence of absence; a great deal of the country has never been surveyed properly.

FOUR QUESTIONS THAT GET YOU MOST OF THE WAY

- Is it a milkweed at all? Five petals bent backward, five hoods above them, every flower stalk radiating from one point, and white latex from a broken leaf.
- How are the leaves arranged? Opposite in facing pairs, alternate one at a time, or whorled three or more to a node.
- What shape are the leaves? Thread-fine, willow-like, oval, broad and oblong, round, or clasping the stem.
- What color are the flowers? Go by petals and hoods together, because many milkweeds are two-toned.

A CAUTION

Milkweed sap is toxic and irritating. Keep it away from your eyes, wash your hands after handling plants, and do not let it into hay or short pasture. Rare and protected species are described here so that they can be recognized and reported, not collected.

The full account of every species, with more photographs, county range maps and sources, is at milkweedusa.com/species/



Wing-Chi Poon. CC BY-SA 2.5. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Antelope Horns

Asclepias asperula

A low, sprawling clump of arching stems topped by softball-sized globes of green flowers with maroon centers, blooming very early on limestone and caliche soils. In Texas and New Mexico it is the plant that meets the first northbound monarchs of the year.

HEIGHT	1ft-2ft	LEAVES	alternate, narrow
FLOWERS	green, cream, maroon	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	5-9	RANGE	9 states, 199 counties



Look for: Flowers in tight spherical clusters, pale green with dark red-purple hoods. No other milkweed in its range looks like this.



Michael Rivera. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Aquatic Milkweed

Asclepias perennis

A small, soft, white-flowered milkweed of southern swamps and river floodplains that will grow in standing water and in shade, two things no other milkweed manages. Its seeds are unique in the genus: they have no silky floss.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, lanceolate
FLOWERS	white, pink	SOIL	Wet
ZONES	6-9	RANGE	17 states, 226 counties



Look for: Grows in genuinely wet ground, often with its feet in water.



Harry Rose from South West Rocks, Australia. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Balloon Plant

Gomphocarpus physocarpus

Not a true milkweed but a close African relative, grown everywhere for its extraordinary inflated, bristly, balloon-like pods. Monarchs will use it as a host, and in frost-free regions it raises exactly the same winter-breeding concerns as tropical milkweed.

HEIGHT	3ft-6ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	white, cream	SOIL	Average
ZONES	8-11	RANGE	9 states



Look for: Pods are pale green spheres covered in soft bristles, unmistakable and unlike any Asclepias.



Patrick Alexander from Las Cruces, NM. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Bract Milkweed

Asclepias brachystephana

A low desert grassland milkweed with narrow folded leaves and dense clusters of small dusky purple flowers held tight in the leaf axils, common on caliche flats in New Mexico and west Texas.

HEIGHT	6in-1.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	maroon, purple	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	6-10	RANGE	3 states, 26 counties



Look for: Small purple-maroon flowers in compact axillary clusters.



Jackvanschaik, CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Broadleaf Milkweed

Asclepias latifolia

Thick, almost circular leaves stacked up a stout stem like a pile of green plates, with flower clusters tucked into the leaf axils. A tough, deeply rooted southern plains species that thrives where summer means 100°F and no rain.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, orbicular
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	5-9	RANGE	10 states, 153 counties



Look for: Leaves are very broad, blunt-tipped and often wider than they are long, clasping the stem closely.



H. Zell, CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Butterfly Weed

Asclepias tuberosa

The one milkweed almost everyone recognizes: flat-topped clusters of brilliant orange flowers on a stiff, hairy, knee-high clump. It is the most garden-worthy species in the genus: tidy, drought-proof, long-lived and unbothered by anything except wet soil. It is also the odd one out in the family, with alternate leaves and watery rather than milky sap.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	alternate, lanceolate
FLOWERS	orange, yellow, red	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	3-9	RANGE	43 states, 1260 counties



Look for: Sap is clear or barely cloudy. It is the only common North American milkweed that does not bleed white latex when a leaf is pulled.



Joe Decruyenaere. CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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California Milkweed

Asclepias californica

A gorgeous, entirely white-woolly California endemic whose deep wine-red flowers hang in heavy nodding clusters against silver foliage. It looks like a plant designed rather than evolved.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	maroon, purple	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-10	RANGE	1 states, 25 counties



Look for: Entire plant thickly felted in white wool, giving a silver-gray appearance.



Siddarth Machado. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Carolina Milkweed

Asclepias cinerea

A wiry, thread-leaved coastal plain milkweed carrying a few widely spaced, unusually elegant ash-mauve flowers that seem to hover in mid-air on hair-fine stalks.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, threadlike
FLOWERS	mauve, gray	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-9	RANGE	6 states, 44 counties



Look for: Very fine, almost invisible flower stalks, so the blooms appear to float.



Choess. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Clasp Milkweed

Asclepias amplexicaulis

Unmistakable once you have seen it: wavy-edged blue-green leaves clasping directly around the stem, and a single long bare stalk lifting one rounded cluster of dusty pink-green flowers well clear of the foliage.

HEIGHT	1.5ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, clasping
FLOWERS	pink, green, mauve	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	3-9	RANGE	34 states, 592 counties



Look for: Leaf bases wrap around the stem with no stalk at all.



NY State IPM Program at Cornell University from New York, USA. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Common Milkweed

Asclepias syriaca

The species that feeds the eastern monarch migration. Big paddle-shaped leaves, thick stems and heavy, drooping balls of dusty-pink flowers with a scent people describe as honey and vanilla. It is also an aggressive rhizomatous colonizer: magnificent in a meadow, a menace in a perennial border.

HEIGHT	3ft-6ft	LEAVES	opposite, oblong
FLOWERS	pink, mauve, white	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	3-9	RANGE	40 states, 912 counties



Look for: Leaves are large, broad and oblong with a prominent pale midrib, felted underneath.



Bob Peterson from North Palm Beach, Florida, Planet Earth!. CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Curtiss' Milkweed

Asclepias curtissii

A Florida scrub endemic listed as endangered by the state, with wavy-edged pale leaves and greenish-white flowers, restricted to the ancient sand ridges of the peninsula.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	white, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-10	RANGE	1 states, 23 counties



Look for: Wavy-margined, pale gray-green leaves in widely spaced pairs.



Mike. CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Desert Milkweed

Asclepias erosa

A big, pale, upright milkweed of the Mojave and Sonoran deserts, with chalky white stems, thick cream-edged leaves and heavy clusters of yellowish-white flowers that persist through the hottest months.

HEIGHT	2ft-5ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	cream, yellow	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-11	RANGE	4 states, 22 counties



Look for: Tall stiff stems that look bleached white or very pale green.



Craig Martin <https://www.inaturalist.org/people/craigmartin>. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Dwarf Milkweed

Asclepias involucrata

A tiny, ground-hugging desert milkweed with wavy narrow leaves and pale green flowers held almost at soil level, found on sand and gravel across the Southwest.

HEIGHT	4in-10in	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	5-9	RANGE	8 states, 37 counties



Look for: Under a foot tall, with stems spreading flat from a central crown.



Matt Berger (sheriff_woody_pct on inaturalist). CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Eastwood's Milkweed

Asclepias eastwoodiana

A Nevada endemic of barren volcanic gravel and clay flats in the central Great Basin, forming low gray-green tufts with dusky maroon and cream flowers. Known from a small number of populations and tracked as a sensitive species.

HEIGHT	6in-1.2ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	maroon, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	5-8	RANGE	1 states



Look for: Low, tufted habit on bare volcanic or ash-derived soils.



Patrick Alexander from Las Cruces, NM. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Emory's Milkweed

Asclepias emoryi

A low, wiry Chihuahuan Desert milkweed of gypsum and caliche flats in west Texas and southern New Mexico, flowering greenish-cream after any decent rain.

HEIGHT	4in-1.2ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	2 states, 27 counties



Look for: Low sprawling stems with narrow, often folded opposite leaves.



scevola_augustin. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Engelmann's Milkweed

Asclepias engelmanniana

A tall, sparse, almost skeletal prairie milkweed with long drooping linear leaves and small greenish-yellow flowers. It looks fragile and is anything but, with a taproot that goes deep into sandy plains soil.

HEIGHT	2ft-5ft	LEAVES	alternate, narrow
FLOWERS	green, yellow	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	8 states, 149 counties



Look for: Very long, narrow, drooping alternate leaves on a tall slender stem.



jimduggan24. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Feay's Milkweed

Asclepias feayi

A Florida endemic of pine flatwoods and sandhill with hair-fine leaves and delicate white flowers flushed pink, so slender that the plant almost disappears into the wiregrass.

HEIGHT	8in-2ft	LEAVES	opposite, threadlike
FLOWERS	white, pink	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-10	RANGE	1 states, 14 counties



Look for: Extremely fine, thread-like opposite leaves.



Happyixie. CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Fewflower Milkweed

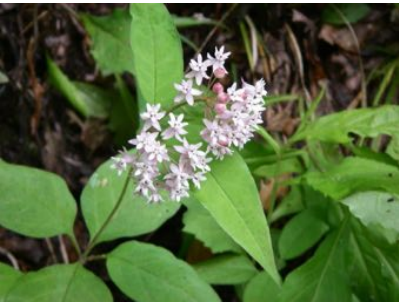
Asclepias lanceolata

A tall, sparse, brilliant orange-red milkweed of coastal marsh and wet savanna. Imagine butterfly weed stretched to five feet, standing in a brackish ditch with only a handful of flowers per head.

HEIGHT	2ft-5ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	orange, red	SOIL	Wet
ZONES	6-10	RANGE	12 states, 131 counties



Look for: Tall unbranched stem with very few, very narrow leaf pairs.



Halpaugh. CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Fourleaf Milkweed

Asclepias quadrifolia

A delicate spring milkweed of dry oak woodland: a slim stem carrying one whorl of four broad leaves at mid-height and a small airy cluster of pale pink flowers. The earliest milkweed to bloom across much of the East.

HEIGHT	1ft-2ft	LEAVES	whorled, ovate
FLOWERS	pink, white	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	27 states, 426 counties



Look for: A single whorl of four leaves partway up the stem, with opposite pairs above and below it.



Habibtadese. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Giant Milkweed

Calotropis procera

A large shrub or small tree from Africa and Asia, naturalized in the warmest parts of the United States. Its huge blue-gray leaves and waxy purple-tipped white flowers make it a striking plant, and monarchs and queens use it as a host, but it is invasive on disturbed dry ground.

HEIGHT	6ft-12ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	white, purple	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	9-11	RANGE	5 states, 1 counties



Look for: Shrub or small tree to twelve feet, far larger than any native milkweed.



Marion Doss. CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Green Antelopehorn

Asclepias viridis

The workhorse of the south-central states: sprawling stems, broad wavy leaves and big open clusters of pale green flowers with purple-tinged centers, blooming early across pasture, roadside and prairie from Texas to Tennessee.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	alternate, oblong
FLOWERS	green, purple	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	5-9	RANGE	18 states, 341 counties



Look for: Flowers pale green with a purplish crown, in large loose clusters at the stem tips.



wackybadger. CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Green Comet Milkweed

Asclepias viridiflora

A subtle, wide-ranging prairie milkweed with tight ball-shaped clusters of purely green flowers pressed against the stem. Enormously variable in leaf shape across its range, from broad and wavy to narrow and folded, which makes it one of the most confusing milkweeds to key out.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, elliptic
FLOWERS	green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	3-9	RANGE	38 states, 784 counties



Look for: Flowers entirely green with no purple or white, in dense sessile or short-stalked clusters.



Patrick Alexander from Las Cruces, NM. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Hall's Milkweed

Asclepias hallii

A handsome southern Rocky Mountain endemic with soft pink-mauve flower clusters and grayish lance-shaped leaves, growing on dry mesas, sandy foothills and piñon-juniper edges from Colorado to Nevada.

HEIGHT	1.5ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, lanceolate
FLOWERS	pink, mauve	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	6 states, 22 counties



Look for: Resembles a slimmer, drier-country showy milkweed with narrower leaves and smaller flowers.



First Light (talk). CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Heartleaf Milkweed

Asclepias cordifolia

Arguably the handsomest milkweed in the West: smooth, waxy, blue-gray heart-shaped leaves clasping arching purple stems, hung with clusters of dark wine-red flowers. A Sierra Nevada and Cascade foothill specialty.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, cordate
FLOWERS	maroon, purple	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	6-9	RANGE	3 states, 39 counties



Look for: Leaves distinctly heart-shaped, clasping the stem, smooth and blue-glaucous.



Jay Horn. CC BY 4.0. iNaturalist.

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Largeflower Milkweed

Asclepias connivens

A wet pine savanna milkweed with unusually large, pale green, cup-shaped flowers whose hoods lean inward and meet over the center, a structure found nowhere else in the genus.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, oblong
FLOWERS	green, white	SOIL	Wet/Average
ZONES	8-10	RANGE	5 states, 35 counties



Look for: Flowers noticeably large for a green milkweed, with hoods converging over the top.



M. Socorro González Elizondo. CC BY-SA 4.0. iNaturalist.

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Lemmon's Milkweed

Asclepias lemmonii

A slim sky-island milkweed of shaded canyon bottoms in southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, with small green flowers flushed purple, appearing after the summer rains.

HEIGHT	8in-2ft	LEAVES	opposite, lanceolate
FLOWERS	green, purple	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	2 states, 3 counties



Look for: Slender stems in moist canyon shade rather than open desert.



Michelle W. (). CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Longhood Milkweed

Asclepias macrotis

A slender limestone-canyon milkweed of west Texas, New Mexico and southern Colorado, with thread-like leaves and small pale flowers whose unusually long hoods give it its name.

HEIGHT	8in-1.7ft	LEAVES	opposite, threadlike
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	6-9	RANGE	4 states, 18 counties



Look for: Very long, projecting hoods on small greenish flowers.



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Longleaf Milkweed

Asclepias longifolia

A slim coastal plain milkweed of damp pine savanna, with long narrow leaves and greenish-white flowers heavily washed in purple, borne in nodding clusters from the upper leaf axils.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	green, purple, white	SOIL	Wet/Average
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	13 states, 101 counties



Look for: Long, narrow, closely spaced opposite leaves.



Sam Kieschnick. CC BY 4.0. iNaturalist.

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Mahogany Milkweed

Asclepias hypoleuca

A handsome sky-island milkweed whose broad leaves are conspicuously white beneath, carrying nodding clusters of deep mahogany-red flowers with pale cream hoods through the monsoon season.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	maroon, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	6-9	RANGE	2 states, 5 counties



Look for: Leaf undersides distinctly white or chalky, which is the giveaway character.



Jay Sturner from USA. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Mead's Milkweed

Asclepias meadii

A federally threatened tallgrass-prairie milkweed with a single nodding cluster of greenish-cream flowers on a slim glaucous stem. It survives almost entirely on hay meadows and prairie remnants that have never been plowed.

HEIGHT	1ft-2ft	LEAVES	opposite, oblong
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Average/Dry
ZONES	4-7	RANGE	4 states, 28 counties



Look for: One drooping flower cluster per stem, pale green-cream.



Kim. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Michaux's Milkweed

Asclepias michauxii

A slender pine-flatwoods milkweed of the coastal plain with very narrow leaves and small dusky pink-green flowers, dependent on regular fire to keep its habitat open.

HEIGHT	8in-1.7ft	LEAVES	opposite, threadlike
FLOWERS	pink, green	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	5 states, 54 counties



Look for: Narrow, almost grass-like opposite leaves on a short upright stem.



Mike. CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Mojave Milkweed

Asclepias nyctaginifolia

A low desert milkweed with broad soft leaves like a four-o'clock plant and nodding clusters of green-cream flowers, scattered across sandy flats and washes in the Mojave and northern Sonoran deserts.

HEIGHT	6in-1.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	4 states, 16 counties



Look for: Broad, soft, wavy-margined leaves close to the ground.



No machine-readable author provided. Curtis Clark assumed (based on copyright claims).. CC BY-SA 2.5. Wikimedia

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Narrowleaf Milkweed

Asclepias fascicularis

The workhorse milkweed of the Pacific states and the backbone of western monarch recovery planting. Slim whorls of narrow leaves, dense clusters of small greenish-white flowers flushed pink, and an ability to shrug off a rainless California summer.

HEIGHT	2ft-4ft	LEAVES	whorled, narrow
FLOWERS	white, pink, green	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	6-10	RANGE	7 states, 99 counties



Look for: Leaves narrow and often in whorls of three to five, but wider and softer than eastern whorled milkweed.



Edgar p miller. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Nodding Milkweed

Asclepias glaucescens

A stout borderland milkweed with thick blue-gray leaves and heavy nodding clusters of greenish-white flowers, growing in oak woodland and canyon grassland in the Arizona and New Mexico sky islands.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	green, white	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	6-10	RANGE	2 states, 11 counties



Look for: Thick, waxy, distinctly blue-gray (glaucous) leaves.



USFWS Mountain Prairie. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Oval-leaf Milkweed

Asclepias ovalifolia

A compact northern-prairie milkweed under two feet tall, with neat oval leaves and small creamy-white flower clusters, found on sandy prairie and open oak savanna from Michigan to Montana.

HEIGHT	8in-1.7ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	white, green	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	3-7	RANGE	9 states, 133 counties



Look for: Short stature with evenly spaced oval opposite leaves, downy beneath.



Thayne Tuason. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Pallid Milkweed

Asclepias cryptoceras

A jewel of the Great Basin: a low sprawling rosette of round, waxy, blue-green leaves surrounding cream flowers with vivid rose-pink hoods, blooming in spring on barren clay and shale slopes where nothing else grows.

HEIGHT	4in-1ft	LEAVES	opposite, orbicular
FLOWERS	cream, pink	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	10 states, 54 counties



Look for: Prostrate habit: the plant lies flat on the ground in a neat circle.



Turner Brockman. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Pineland Milkweed

Asclepias obovata

A modest greenish-yellow-flowered milkweed of dry southeastern pinelands and sandy roadsides, with softly hairy paddle-shaped leaves.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, oblong
FLOWERS	green, yellow	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-9	RANGE	7 states, 75 counties



Look for: Leaves broadest above the middle, blunt-tipped and downy.



Juan Carlos Fonseca Mata. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Pineneedle Milkweed

Asclepias linaria

A shrubby, evergreen-looking milkweed densely clothed in soft needle-like leaves, resembling a small conifer until it produces its white flower clusters. A favorite of desert gardeners in Arizona and New Mexico.

HEIGHT	1.5ft-4ft	LEAVES	alternate, threadlike
FLOWERS	white, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-11	RANGE	3 states, 10 counties



Look for: Dense, soft, pine-needle foliage on a woody-based shrubby plant.



ggallice. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Pinewoods Milkweed

Asclepias humistrata

One of the most beautiful foliage plants in the genus: sprawling stems of thick blue-gray clasping leaves veined in bright pink, lying flat on white sand under longleaf pine, topped with pale pink-white flowers in spring.

HEIGHT	8in-2ft	LEAVES	opposite, clasping
FLOWERS	pink, white	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	7 states, 108 counties



Look for: Leaves waxy blue-gray with vivid pink or magenta veins, and unmistakable for it.



Jim Pisarowicz. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

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Plains Milkweed

Asclepias pumila

A knee-high-at-most tuft of fine, almost dill-like foliage carrying tiny cream flowers, scattered across shortgrass prairie from Montana to the Texas Panhandle. Easily mistaken for a grass until it blooms.

HEIGHT	4in-1ft	LEAVES	alternate, threadlike
FLOWERS	white, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	3-8	RANGE	10 states, 175 counties



Look for: Rarely over a foot tall, with crowded thread-fine alternate leaves.



SALLY KING. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

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Poison Milkweed

Asclepias subverticillata

The whorled milkweed of the Southwest and southern Rockies: thin, wiry, colony-forming, and the species behind most milkweed poisoning cases in the region. Ecologically useful on wild ground, but not a plant to introduce deliberately.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	whorled, threadlike
FLOWERS	white, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	4-9	RANGE	10 states, 105 counties



Look for: Very narrow leaves in whorls, with smaller leaves clustered in the axils giving a bushy, feathery look.



Dcharris555. CC BY-SA 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Poke Milkweed

Asclepias exaltata

The woodland milkweed. Tall and slender with broad thin leaves like pokeweed, carrying loose, drooping clusters of green-and-white flowers that hang like small chandeliers along a shaded forest edge.

HEIGHT	3ft-6ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	white, green	SOIL	Average
ZONES	3-8	RANGE	27 states, 445 counties



Look for: Grows in shade and dappled woodland, which no other milkweed reliably does.



gmayfield10. CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Prairie Milkweed

Asclepias sullivantii

Common milkweed's refined cousin: the same big pink umbels and broad leaves, but smooth and hairless throughout, with an elegant red midrib and none of the coarseness. A tallgrass prairie plant that has declined sharply with the prairie itself.

HEIGHT	2ft-4ft	LEAVES	opposite, oblong
FLOWERS	pink, rose	SOIL	Average/Wet
ZONES	3-7	RANGE	14 states, 201 counties



Look for: Completely smooth and hairless, with no down on stems, leaves or pods.



Sam Kieschnick. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Prostrate Milkweed

Asclepias prostrata

A federally endangered milkweed known from a few sites in the south Texas brush country, growing completely flat against gravelly ground with small greenish-white flowers. It was listed under the Endangered Species Act in 2023.

HEIGHT	2in-6in	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	green, white	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-10	RANGE	1 states, 2 counties



Look for: Entirely prostrate, with stems lying flat on bare gravelly soil.



Kurt Stüber [1], CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Purple Milkweed

Asclepias purpurascens

The most intensely colored milkweed in eastern North America, with deep magenta-purple flower heads held upright above broad leaves, blooming a few weeks before common milkweed. Uncommon and declining nearly everywhere, and worth every effort to establish.

HEIGHT	2ft-4ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	purple, magenta	SOIL	Average/Dry
ZONES	3-8	RANGE	35 states, 392 counties



Look for: Flowers are a saturated purple-magenta, far darker than the dusty pink of common milkweed.



peganum from Henfield, England. CC BY-SA 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Red Milkweed

Asclepias rubra

A rare bog and seepage-slope milkweed with dusky rose-red flowers and stiff, sharply pointed leaves, scattered thinly down the Atlantic coastal plain and listed as endangered in most northern states where it survives.

HEIGHT	2ft-4ft	LEAVES	opposite, lanceolate
FLOWERS	red, pink	SOIL	Wet
ZONES	6-9	RANGE	18 states, 77 counties



Look for: Flowers dull red to rose, in one or a few upright clusters.



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Rusby's Milkweed

Asclepias rusbyi

A slender milkweed of Arizona and New Mexico pine-oak woodland and mountain grassland, with narrow alternate leaves and small greenish-white flower clusters. It follows the summer monsoon rather than the spring.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	alternate, narrow
FLOWERS	green, white	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	5-9	RANGE	2 states, 9 counties



Look for: Narrow, alternate, often slightly folded leaves on a wiry upright stem.



Stan Shebs. CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Rush Milkweed

Asclepias subulata

A leafless-looking fountain of blue-green pencil-thick stems topped with cream flowers, growing in the hottest, driest washes of the Sonoran and Mojave deserts. It looks like a sculpture and needs no water at all.

HEIGHT	2ft-6ft	LEAVES	opposite, threadlike
FLOWERS	cream, white	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-11	RANGE	4 states, 11 counties



Look for: Effectively leafless, because the narrow leaves drop early and leave bundles of erect stems.



Brad Grimm, CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Ruth's Milkweed

Asclepias ruthiae

A low, spreading Colorado Plateau milkweed of red sand and slickrock country, with small thick leaves and pale pink-cream flowers held close to the ground among the sandstone.

HEIGHT	4in-1ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	pink, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	5-9	RANGE	3 states



Look for: Prostrate to low-spreading stems radiating from a central taproot.



sonnia hill, CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Sand Milkweed

Asclepias arenaria

A stout, velvety-gray milkweed of deep sand, found in sandhills, blowouts and dune country from Nebraska to Texas, with crowded cream flower clusters and thick wavy-edged leaves.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	cream, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	8 states, 97 counties



Look for: Whole plant densely covered in short white hairs, giving a gray cast.



Justin. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Savannah Milkweed

Asclepias pedicellata

A small, easily overlooked coastal plain milkweed with narrow leaves and a few pale greenish-yellow flowers on long stalks, growing in damp pine savanna and flatwoods.

HEIGHT	6in-1.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	yellow, green	SOIL	Wet/Average
ZONES	8-10	RANGE	2 states, 51 counties



Look for: Very few flowers per plant, each on a conspicuously long stalk.



Shasta-Trinity National Forest USDA Forest Service.. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Serpentine Milkweed

Asclepias solanoana

A prostrate northern California endemic confined to serpentine barrens, forming flat mats of round gray-green leaves studded with small cream flowers. It grows on soil so metal-rich that almost nothing else survives.

HEIGHT	4in-10in	LEAVES	opposite, orbicular
FLOWERS	cream, pink	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-9	RANGE	1 states, 10 counties



Look for: Completely prostrate mats on bare serpentine rock and soil.



Dcrjsr. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Showy Milkweed

Asclepias speciosa

The West's answer to common milkweed, and the single most important monarch host plant between the Great Plains and the Sierra Nevada. Its flowers are the showiest in the genus: star-shaped, rose-pink, with long pointed hoods that give each cluster a spiky, ornamental look. Gray-green velvety foliage sets it apart at fifty paces.

HEIGHT	2ft-5ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	pink, rose	SOIL	Average/Dry
ZONES	3-9	RANGE	21 states, 463 counties



Look for: Hoods are long, narrow and sharply pointed, giving the flower head a distinctly starry silhouette. This is the key difference from common milkweed.



Samuel A. Schmid. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Slimleaf Milkweed

Asclepias stenophylla

A tall wand of a plant with grass-fine leaves and creamy-green flowers clustered tight against the stem, scattered through unplowed tallgrass and mixed-grass prairie.

HEIGHT	1.5ft-3.3ft	LEAVES	alternate, threadlike
FLOWERS	cream, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	13 states, 176 counties



Look for: Extremely narrow alternate leaves, sometimes eight inches long and only a few millimeters wide.



Andrew Tree. CC BY 4.0. iNaturalist.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Slimpod Milkweed

Asclepias quinqueidentata

A slight, wiry milkweed of Arizona and New Mexico mountain woodland with very narrow leaves and small cream-green flowers, producing the exceptionally slim pods that give it its name.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	cream, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	6-9	RANGE	2 states, 6 counties



Look for: Very narrow opposite leaves on thin, often leaning stems.



Leyla. CC BY 4.0. iNaturalist.

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Southern Milkweed

Asclepias viridula

A rare wet-savanna milkweed of the Florida panhandle and south Georgia, with narrow leaves and small greenish-white flowers, tracked as threatened across its small range.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	green, white	SOIL	Wet
ZONES	8-9	RANGE	2 states, 11 counties



Look for: Slender upright stems in permanently damp pine savanna and bog edges.



Richard Rintz. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE, RARE MONARCH ●●●●●

Sperry's Milkweed

Asclepias sperryi

A rare Trans-Pecos endemic of limestone ridges and rocky slopes in far west Texas, with thread-fine leaves and small cream flowers, known from very few localities.

HEIGHT	8in-1.7ft	LEAVES	opposite, threadlike
FLOWERS	cream, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-9	RANGE	1 states, 2 counties



Look for: Thread-fine opposite leaves on slender clustered stems.



Superior National Forest. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Swamp Milkweed

Asclepias incarnata

The best-behaved milkweed there is: a tidy, clump-forming, non-running perennial with narrow willow-like leaves and domed clusters of vivid rose-pink flowers that smell faintly of cinnamon. It grows in wet ground in the wild but is perfectly happy in ordinary garden soil, which makes it the safest choice for a border.

HEIGHT	3ft-5ft	LEAVES	opposite, lanceolate
FLOWERS	pink, rose, white	SOIL	Wet/Average
ZONES	3-9	RANGE	43 states, 1079 counties



Look for: Narrow, smooth, willow-like leaves on a slender stem that branches near the top.



Mason Brock (Masebrock). Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Tall Green Milkweed

Asclepias hirtella

A stiff, upright tallgrass-prairie milkweed with crowded narrow leaves and dense round clusters of small greenish-white flowers, common on prairie remnants and railroad rights of way through the Midwest.

HEIGHT	2ft-4ft	LEAVES	alternate, narrow
FLOWERS	green, white	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	18 states, 230 counties



Look for: Numerous narrow alternate leaves crowded up a single rigid stem.



Mason Brock (Masebrock). Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

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Texas Milkweed

Asclepias texana

A refined Edwards Plateau endemic with thin dark green leaves and clean white flower clusters, growing in limestone canyons and creek beds through the Texas Hill Country.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	white	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	7-9	RANGE	2 states, 12 counties



Look for: Pure white flowers in neat rounded clusters.



James St. John. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

INTRODUCED MONARCH ●●●●●

Tropical Milkweed

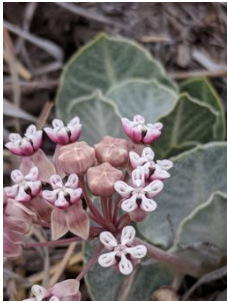
Asclepias curassavica

The scarlet-and-gold milkweed sold in nearly every garden center. It is not native to the United States, it flowers relentlessly, and in frost-free regions that is exactly the problem: it disrupts monarch migration and builds up parasite loads. Beautiful plant, genuinely bad ecological actor south of the frost line.

HEIGHT	2ft-4ft	LEAVES	opposite, lanceolate
FLOWERS	red, orange, yellow	SOIL	Average
ZONES	8-11	RANGE	11 states, 32 counties



Look for: Flowers are two-toned, a red or orange corolla with a bright yellow-orange crown, unlike any native species.



Alison Northup. CC BY 4.0. iNaturalist.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Tufted Milkweed

Asclepias nummularia

One of the smallest milkweeds in North America, a low tuft of tiny round woolly leaves on rocky Arizona desert slopes, easy to walk past even in flower.

HEIGHT	2in-8in	LEAVES	opposite, orbicular
FLOWERS	cream, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	1 states, 7 counties



Look for: Tiny, nearly circular, densely hairy leaves.



Florida Native Plant Society. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Velvetleaf Milkweed

Asclepias tomentosa

A softly furred, low-growing milkweed of southeastern coastal sandhills and scrub, with greenish-cream flowers and leaves felted enough to feel like suede.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	4 states, 40 counties



Look for: Whole plant densely velvety to the touch.



USFWS Mountain-Prairie. CC BY 2.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE, RARE MONARCH ●●●●●

Welsh's Milkweed

Asclepias welshii

A federally threatened dune endemic known from only a handful of active sand dune systems on the Utah-Arizona border, including the Coral Pink Sand Dunes. Thick woolly gray leaves and creamy flower clusters on plants that survive by growing up through shifting sand.

HEIGHT	1.5ft-4ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	cream, pink	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	5-8	RANGE	2 states, 4 counties



Look for: Broad, thick, densely white-woolly leaves in well-spaced opposite pairs.



Steve Olson. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

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Wheel Milkweed

Asclepias uncialis

One of the rarest and smallest milkweeds in North America, a two-inch-high scatter of maroon-tinged flowers on the shortgrass steppe, tracked as a species of concern in several states including Colorado.

HEIGHT	2in-6in	LEAVES	opposite, narrow
FLOWERS	maroon, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	4-8	RANGE	7 states, 26 counties



Look for: Minute: frequently no taller than a golf tee, easily overlooked among grass.



Mason Brock (Masebrock). Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

White Milkweed

Asclepias variegata

Tight snowball clusters of pure white flowers, each ringed with a fine purple-red band at its base, glowing in the half-shade of southeastern oak and pine woods. The most striking white-flowered milkweed in North America.

HEIGHT	1.5ft-3.5ft	LEAVES	opposite, ovate
FLOWERS	white	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	5-9	RANGE	25 states, 469 counties



Look for: Dense, almost spherical clusters of white flowers, unlike the loose heads of poke milkweed.



NPS. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

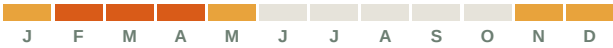
NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Whitestem Milkweed

Asclepias albicans

The tallest milkweed in North America: chalk-white, essentially leafless stems rising to ten feet from rocky desert slopes in the Sonoran Desert, tipped with clusters of cream flowers in late winter.

HEIGHT	3ft-10ft	LEAVES	opposite, threadlike
FLOWERS	cream, white	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	9-11	RANGE	3 states, 8 counties



Look for: Very tall, wand-like, waxy white stems in a clump.



Choess. CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Whorled Milkweed

Asclepias verticillata

A wiry, fine-textured milkweed that looks more like a horsetail than an Asclepias, with needle-thin leaves in whorls up a slim stem and small greenish-white flowers late in the season. It slips into thin, poor, dry ground where nothing else will grow.

HEIGHT	1ft-2.5ft	LEAVES	whorled, threadlike
FLOWERS	white, green	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	3-9	RANGE	42 states, 983 counties



Look for: Leaves are thread-fine, one to two millimeters wide, arranged in whorls of three to six around the stem.



Patrick Alexander from Las Cruces, NM. CC0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Woolly Milkweed

Asclepias lanuginosa

A tiny, shaggy-haired prairie milkweed only a few inches tall, with one cream flower cluster held on a short stalk. Conservation-listed across most of the upper Midwest.

HEIGHT	4in-1ft	LEAVES	alternate, lanceolate
FLOWERS	cream, green	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	3-7	RANGE	10 states, 84 counties



Look for: Densely covered in long soft hairs throughout.



Chloe and Trevor Van Loon. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

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Woolly Milkweed

Asclepias vestita

A low, densely white-woolly milkweed of California's San Joaquin Valley and adjacent desert edges, with crowded pale yellow-cream flowers and thick felted leaves.

HEIGHT	1ft-3ft	LEAVES	alternate, oblong
FLOWERS	cream, yellow	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	8-10	RANGE	2 states, 26 counties



Look for: Heavily white-woolly throughout, often looking almost gray-white.



Pacific Southwest Region USFWS from Sacramento, US. Public domain. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Woollypod Milkweed

Asclepias eriocarpa

A stout, woolly, cream-flowered California milkweed of dry hillsides and roadsides, with thick whorled leaves and densely hairy pods. Historically the most important fiber plant of several California Indigenous nations.

HEIGHT	2ft-4ft	LEAVES	whorled, oblong
FLOWERS	cream, white	SOIL	Dry
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	2 states, 26 counties



Look for: Thick, wavy-edged leaves usually in whorls of three or four.



Tyler Cannon. CC BY 4.0. Wikimedia Commons.

NATIVE MONARCH ●●●●●

Zizotes Milkweed

Asclepias oenotheroides

A low, sprawling Texas and Southwest milkweed with wavy-edged leaves and greenish-cream flower clusters arising from the leaf axils. It blooms for most of the year and re-sprouts endlessly after mowing, which makes it one of the most reliable monarch hosts on the southern plains.

HEIGHT	8in-2ft	LEAVES	opposite, oblong
FLOWERS	green, cream	SOIL	Dry/Average
ZONES	7-10	RANGE	5 states, 94 counties



Look for: Flower clusters emerge from the leaf axils along the stem, not just at the tip.

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