

# Milkweeds of the Upper Midwest

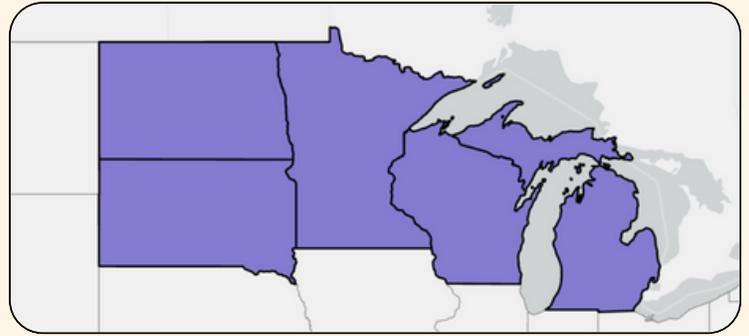


Monarch butterflies depend on milkweed to survive. Monarch caterpillars can only eat milkweed (*Asclepias* spp.), and adult females lay eggs exclusively on these plants. Unfortunately, changing land management practices have significantly reduced milkweed across the landscape. Use this document to help you identify what milkweeds may be present in your area, or to determine which species may be suitable for planting. Please try to find plants grown as close as possible to where you'll be planting them, and from the closest possible seed source.



**Common Milkweed**  
*Asclepias syriaca*

Well-drained soils, sandy soils, and sunny areas. Grows to a height of 3-5 ft. Leaves are broadly shaped with opposite (sometimes whorled) attachment and short petioles. Blooms are typically pink to purple. Common across region.



The region covered in this resource includes:  
**SD, ND, MN, WI, & MI.**



**Swamp Milkweed**  
*Asclepias incarnata*

Damp, marshy areas. Grows to 3-5 ft., with oppositely attached, narrow, lance-shaped leaves that taper to a sharp point. Small flowers are fragrant and grow in umbels, ranging from deep pink-purple to whiteish. Less common in ND & SD.



**Whorled Milkweed**  
*Asclepias verticillata*

Prairies and open areas. Very narrow, needle-like leaves growing in whorls. Shorter than other milkweed species, growing as a single stem 6 in.-3 ft. tall, with white flowers. Spreads by rhizomes, often growing in large densities.



**Butterfly Weed**  
*Asclepias tuberosa*

Well-drained soils. 1- 3½ ft. tall with bright orange blooms. Leaf arrangements vary between alternate and opposite, with hairy stems that lack milky sap typical of most milkweeds. Plants often appear bushy with many stems growing from a central point.



**Poke Milkweed**  
*Asclepias exaltata*

Found in moist woodland habitats, shores, and woodland edges. 2-6 ft. tall. Oval-shaped leaves tapering to a point, oppositely attached. White-green flowers grow in drooping clusters. Less common in MN. Not found in SD and ND.



**Green Comet Milkweed**  
*Asclepias viridiflora*

Moist to dry shaded roadsides, fields, prairies. Grows 1-3 ft. tall. Flowers are pale green, growing in densely packed round clusters. Leaves usually oppositely attached, varying in shape from linear to lance-oblong. Uncommon in northern portions of MN, WI, and Upper Peninsula of MI.



**Showy Milkweed**  
*Asclepias speciosa*

Savannas and prairies. Grows 2-3 ft. tall. Broad, oval leaves with little to no leaf stem. Soft purple-pink flowers grow in round umbels with long, pointed flower hoods, giving floral clusters a spiked look. Present along MN's western border and throughout SD & ND, rare in WI and MI.



**Oval-leaved Milkweed**  
*Asclepias ovalifolia*

Savannas and prairies. Low to the ground, growing 10 in.-22 ft. tall, with delicate white flowers and oppositely attached, oval-shaped leaves. Typically grows as a single erect stem, but occurring in groups. Within Upper Midwest, found primarily in ND, MN, and WI; rarer in SD and MI.



**Clasping Milkweed**  
*Asclepias amplexicaulis*

Dry fields and open woodlands, sandy soils. Grows 2-3 ft. tall. Flowers are pink & green. Oval-shaped leaves with wavy margins, typically clasping the stem. Not present in ND, SD, and rare in MN. Can be seen in WI and MI.



**Prairie Milkweed or Sullivant's Milkweed**  
*Asclepias sullivantii*

Moist prairies, full sun. Grows 2-3 ft., with oppositely attached leaves shaped ovate to lanceolate or elliptic. Flowers have purple petals and rose/pink hood. Not present in SD & ND, known only to south-central MN/WI, rare in MI.



**Purple Milkweed**  
*Asclepias purpurascens*

Fields, thickets, open woodlands. 2-3 ft. tall. Leaves are oppositely attached, round at base, and narrowed to a pointed tip. Flowers are distinctively deep purple. Not present in SD, ND, or MN. Only in southern WI and MI.



**Tall Green Milkweed**  
*Asclepias hirtella*

Open habitats with dry sandy soil, prairies. Grows up to 3 ft. tall. Has many narrow leaves attached alternately along stem. Each stem may have many floral umbels with white to greenish flowers, petals often tinged with purple. Within region, only known to WI and MI, but rare.

Check out the MJV Milkweed and Wildflower Vendor Map to find milkweed near you!



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