



MILKWEEDS OF KANSAS & MISSOURI



Milkweeds (*Asclepias* spp.) are herbaceous perennial plants named for their milky sap. These plants occur in a wide range of habitats, including intact natural communities on roadsides and highly disturbed roadsides. As required host plants for monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) caterpillars, milkweeds play an essential role in the butterfly's life cycle (see reverse). Vegetation management that allows milkweeds to persist can support monarchs. This guide can help you recognize the most common native species found on roadsides in your region.

KEY ↘

The most common milkweeds in roadsides in Kansas & Missouri (in alphabetical order):

Swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*)



PLANT: One to many upright, branched stems; smooth or with short hairs. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped or narrow; with few short hairs. **HABITAT:** Moist prairies, marshes, ditches, edges of ponds, lakes, streams. **SOILS:** Silty to loamy or clayey; moist-wet, tolerates some mesic. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; light to dark pink or rose purple.

Common milkweed (*A. syriaca*)



PLANT: One to many stout, upright, unbranched stems; usually with short dense hairs. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; hairy underneath. **HABITAT:** Prairies, old fields, railways, open woods, flood plains, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Sandy to loamy, clayey or rocky; dry-wet. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; pink.

Butterfly milkweed (*A. tuberosa*)



PLANT: One to many spreading to upright stems; with short hairs; lacks milky sap. **LEAVES:** Alternate; lance-shaped; hairy underneath. **HABITAT:** Prairies, old fields, glades, open woods. **SOILS:** Sandy, loamy, rocky; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Sep; orange to red or yellow.

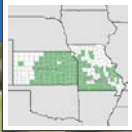
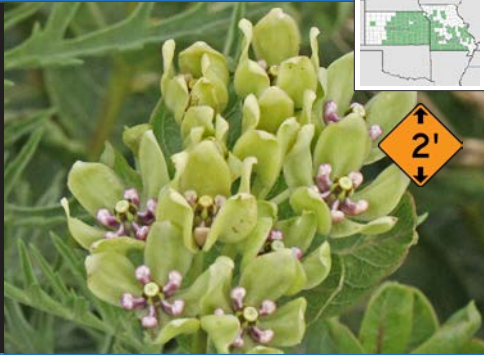
Whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*)



PLANT: One to several upright, unbranched stems; with short hairs. **LEAVES:** Whorled; narrow to needle-like; smooth or with short hairs. **HABITAT:** Prairies, open woods, fields, flood plains, glades, railways, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Sandy, rocky, clayey; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Sep; white to green.

Most common milkweed species *continued*

Green antelopehorn (*A. viridis*)



PLANT: Multiple upright, unbranched stems; usually smooth. **LEAVES:** Alternate; lance- to oval-shaped; with wavy margins. **HABITAT:** Upland prairies, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Sandy, rocky, clayey; dry. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; green with touches of purple.

Additional Resources:

- ⇒ For more information on monarchs and roadsides, including monitoring, visit: tinyurl.com/MJV-Monarchs-Roadsides
- ⇒ Mowing and Monarchs: tinyurl.com/MJV-MowingForMonarchs
- ⇒ Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation: xerces.org
- ⇒ Monarch Joint Venture: monarchjointventure.org

Less common roadside milkweeds:

Green milkweed (*A. hirtella*)



PLANT: Upright, unbranched stems; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate; long and narrow to lance-shaped; with short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to rocky or clayey; dry-dry-mesic; prairies, open woods, glades, railways. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; green with purple or cream.



Slimleaf milkweed (*A. stenophylla*)



PLANT: Upright, unbranched stems; 2' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate; very narrow to lance-shaped; folded lengthwise; with short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to rocky; dry; prairies, meadows, glades, bluffs. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; yellow to pale green with touches of white.



Prairie milkweed (*A. sullivantii*)



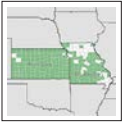
PLANT: Upright, unbranched, stout stems; smooth; 4' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance- to oval-shaped; very smooth. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy clay or loamy; mesic-moist; prairies, wet meadows. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; pink with light green or purple.



Green comet milkweed (*A. viridiflora*)



PLANT: Spreading to upright, unbranched stems; with short hairs, 3' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped; edges folded upward or wavy; with short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to loamy or rocky; dry-dry-mesic; prairies, old fields, forests, glades. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; light to yellowish green.



Additional milkweeds in Kansas and/or Missouri: *Asclepias amplexicaulis*, *A. arenaria*, *A. asperula* ssp. *capricornu*, *A. engelmanniana*, *A. involucrata*, *A. lanuginosa*, *A. latifolia*, *A. meadii*, *A. perennis*, *A. pumila*, *A. purpurascens*, *A. quadrifolia*, *A. speciosa*, *A. subverticillata*, *A. variegata*.

Maps & Distribution Data:

These profiles are derived from regional floras and field guides and Woodson's *The North American Species of Asclepias* (1954). Most common species are abundant across both states and are found in roadsides. Less common species might not occur in both states, have a limited distribution across a state, or may be less common in roadsides. Additional species may be uncommon in roadsides, have a small distribution in a state, or are uncommon or rare. The range maps indicate counties where species have been observed (but may be incomplete), and were created by USDA-NRCS using the latest data from the USDA's PLANTS database (<https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov>).

THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLE

1 Egg
3-5 DAYS

2 Larva
10-14 DAYS

Caterpillar grows by molting
5 INSTARS

4 Adult
2-5 WEEKS (BREEDING GENERATIONS);
6-9 MONTHS (OVERWINTERING GENERATION)

3 Chrysalis
10-14 DAYS

Multiple generations of monarchs are produced over the spring and summer, with the fall generation migrating to overwintering sites. You can monitor monarchs or milkweeds; see Additional Resources above.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Written by Jennifer Hopwood, Stephanie Frischie, and Ray Moranz (Xerces Society), and Alison Cariveau (Monarch Joint Venture). Reviewed by Craig Freeman (University of Kansas) and Carol Davit (Missouri Prairie Foundation). Design, header, and monarch life cycle by Sara Morris (Xerces Society). This work was conducted in the National Cooperative Highway Research Program, which is administered by the Transportation Research Board of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

PHOTO CREDITS: Jim Fowler (*A. syriaca*); Krista Lundgren, USFWS / flickr (*A. viridiflora*); Jerry Oldenettel / flickr (*A. verticillata*); Tom Potterfield / flickr (*A. incarnata*); Paul Rothrock / SEINet (*A. hirtella*); Scott Seigfreid (*A. tuberosa*); Xerces Society / Ray Moranz (*A. stenophylla*, *A. sullivantii*). Photographs remain under the copyright of the photographer. © 2019 by The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. Xerces® is a trademark registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.