



# MILKWEEDS OF ARKANSAS, LOUISIANA & MISSISSIPPI



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.



## The most common milkweeds in roadsides in Arkansas, Louisiana & Mississippi (in alphabetical order):

**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, open woodlands. **SOILS:** Sandy, loamy, rocky; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; orange to red or yellow.

**Redring milkweed (*A. variegata*)**



**PLANT:** Upright, unbranched stem; purplish-green; usually smooth. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; usually smooth. **HABITAT:** Savannas, rocky woodlands and edges, banks of streams; prefers some shade. **SOILS:** Sandy, rocky, loam to clay-loamy; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; white to light green, with red or purple ring.

**Whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*)**



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

**Green comet milkweed (*A. viridiflora*)**



**PLANT:** Multiple unbranched spreading to upright stems; with short hairs. **LEAVES:** Opposite; either lance- or oval-shaped; with edges folded upward or wavy. **HABITAT:** Prairies, old fields, dunes, open woodlands. **SOILS:** Rocky or sandy, but tolerates loamy; dry-dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; light green to yellowish green.

## Most common milkweed species *continued*

### Green antelopehorn (*A. viridis*)



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

### Additional Resources:

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

## Less common roadside milkweeds:

### Clasping milkweed (*A. amplexicaulis*)



**PLANT:** Unbranched, upright stems; smooth; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; wavy margins; base of leaves clasp stem. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, rocky; dry; sandhills, grasslands, savannas. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; green with pink or purple.

### Green milkweed (*A. hirtella*)



**PLANT:** Unbranched, upright stems; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate; long and narrow to lance-shaped; short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to rocky or clayey; dry-moist; prairies, meadows, open woods, sometimes marshes. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; green with purple or cream.

### Aquatic milkweed (*A. perennis*)



**PLANT:** Multiple upright stems branching from base; dark green and hairless; 2' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance- to oval-shaped; often green all winter. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Wetland soils; ditches, streams, swamps. **BLOOM:** May-Nov; white flowers (pink-tipped when in bud).

### Purple milkweed (*A. purpurascens*)



**PLANT:** Upright, unbranched, stout stems; smooth; 6' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; smooth above with fine hairs below. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Loamy to clayey; mesic; prairies, meadows, woodland edges, savannas. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; dark rose to purple.

**Additional milkweeds in Arkansas, Louisiana, and/or Mississippi:** *Asclepias incarnata*, *A. lanceolata*, *A. longifolia*, *A. michauxii*, *A. obovata*, *A. oenotheroides*, *A. quadrifolia*, *A. rubra*, *A. stenophylla*, *A. syriaca*.

## 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.

### 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 the states and are found in roadsides. Less common species might not occur in all 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 region, 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>).

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**PHOTO CREDITS:** Mary Keim / flickr (*A. perennis*); Krista Lundgren, USFWS / flickr (*A. viridiflora*); Jerry Oldenettel / flickr (*A. verticillata*, *A. viridis*); Tom Potterfield / flickr (*A. purpurascens*); Karan A. Rawlins, University of Georgia / Bugwood.org (*A. variegata*); Paul Rothrock / SEINet (*A. amplexicaulis*, *A. hirtella*); Scott Seigfried (*A. tuberosa*). 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.