



MILKWEEDS OF MONTANA & WYOMING



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 Montana & Wyoming (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:** Wet meadows, grasslands, ditches, edges of ponds, lakes, streams. **SOILS:** Silty to loamy or clayey; moist-wet. **BLOOM:** Jun-Jul; pink, light purple.

Plains milkweed (*A. pumila*)



PLANT: Upright, unbranched or branched stems; with fine hairs. **LEAVES:** Alternate, may appear whorled; thin and narrow; dense on stems (bottlebrush appearance). **HABITAT:** Prairies, plains, low hills. **SOILS:** Rocky, sandy, gypseous, calcareous; dry. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; white to pink.

Showy milkweed (*A. speciosa*)



PLANT: Stout upright, unbranched stems; hairy. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; hairy. **HABITAT:** Grasslands, meadows, fields, disturbed areas, edges of rivers, ponds. **SOILS:** Sandy to loamy; dry-moist. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; pink and cream or white; flowers are the largest of North American species.

Whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*)



PLANT: One to several upright, usually unbranched stems; sparsely hairy. **LEAVES:** Whorled; narrow to thread-like; leaf margins rolled downward; smooth or with short hairs. **HABITAT:** Grasslands, open woodlands, badlands, plains. **SOILS:** Sandy, rocky, clayey; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; white to greenish.

Most common milkweed species *continued*

Green comet milkweed (*A. viridiflora*)

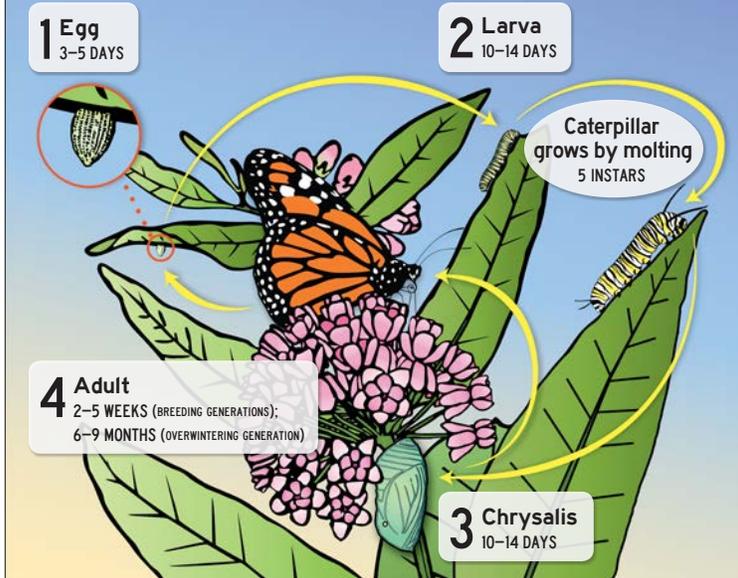


PLANT: Unbranched stems, spreading to upright; with short hairs; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped; narrow and often with margins folded upward; with short hairs. **HABITAT:** Grasslands, plains, hills, old fields. **SOILS:** Sandy to loamy or rocky; dry-dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** Jun-Jul; light green to green.

Additional Resources:

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

THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLE



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 Stephanie McKnight and Jennifer Hopwood (Xerces Society), and Alison Cariveau (Monarch Joint Venture). Reviewed by Monica Pokorny (USDA-NRCS Montana) and Aaron Clausen (Pheasants Forever). 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.

Less common roadside milkweeds:

Hall's milkweed (*A. hallii*)



PLANT: Upright, unbranched stem or branched at base; hairy; 2' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate to opposite; narrow oval-shaped; hairy. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, gravelly; dry; prairies, wash-bottoms, hills (Wyoming only). **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; purple, pink, cream or white with green.

Oval-leaf milkweed (*A. ovalifolia*)



PLANT: Upright, unbranched stems; with fine hairs; 2' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance- to oval-shaped; fine hairs underneath. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, silty loam; dry; prairies, open woods. **BLOOM:** Jun-Jul; cream or white with pink or yellow.

Slimleaf milkweed (*A. stenophylla*)



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

Horsetail milkweed (*A. subverticillata*)



PLANT: Upright branched or unbranched stems; smooth or with fine hairs; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Whorled; narrow; smooth. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy; moist; plains, hills, disturbed areas, ditches (Wyoming only). **BLOOM:** May-Aug; yellow to cream or purple.

Additional milkweeds in Montana and Wyoming: *Asclepias arenaria*, *A. cryptoceras*, *A. engelmanniana*, *A. syriaca*, *A. uncialis*.

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>).

PHOTO CREDITS: Frankia Coburn / SEINet (*A. hallii*); Max Licher / SEINet (*A. subverticillata*); Krista Lundgren, USFWS / flickr (*A. viridiflora*, *A. ovalifolia*); Jerry Oldenettel / flickr (*A. verticillata*); Tom Potterfield / flickr (*A. incarnata*); Xerces Society / Stephanie McKnight (*A. speciosa*); Xerces Society / Ray Moranz (*A. pumilla*, *A. stenophylla*). 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.