



ROADSIDE HABITAT
FOR MONARCHS



MILKWEEDS OF NEBRASKA & THE DAKOTAS



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 ↗



MAY BE MORE
TOLERANT OF MOWING

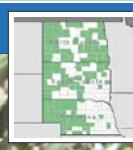
The most common milkweeds in roadsides in Nebraska & The Dakotas (in alphabetical order):

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.

Showy milkweed (*A. speciosa*)



RHIZOMATOUS

PLANT: Stout upright, unbranched stems; hairy. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; hairy. **HABITAT:** Prairies, old fields, edges of rivers, ponds, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Sandy to loamy; dry to slightly wet, prefers moist soils. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; pink and cream or white; flowers are the largest of American species.

Common milkweed (*A. syriaca*)



PLANT: One to many erect, stout 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:** Jun-Aug; pink.

Whorled milkweed (*A. verticillata*)



RHIZOMATOUS

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, disturbed areas. **SOILS:** Loamy, sandy, rocky, clayey; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** Jun-Sep; white to green.

(Continued on next page.)

Most common milkweed species continued

Green comet milkweed (*A. viridiflora*)



PLANT: Unbranched stems, spreading to erect; with short hairs. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped with edges folded upward or wavy; with short hairs. **HABITAT:** Prairies, old fields, dunes, forests. **SOILS:** Sandy to loamy or rocky; dry-dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; light green to yellowish green.

Less common roadside milkweeds:

Sand milkweed (*A. arenaria*)



PLANT: Spreading to upright, unbranched stems; hairy; 6' max.

LEAVES: Opposite; broadly oval-shaped; woolly hairs. **SOILS/**

HABITAT: Sandy; dry; prairies, rangeland, riverbanks, dunes. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; pale green, yellow or cream with tines of pink or purple.

Oval-leaf milkweed (*A. ovalifolia*)



PLANT: Upright, unbranched stems; with fine hairs; 2' max.

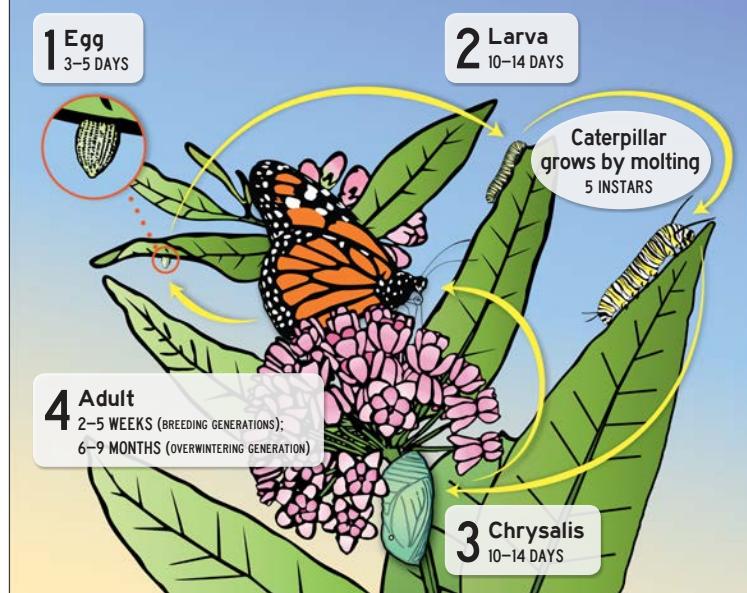
LEAVES: Opposite; lance-shaped to oval-shaped; fine hairs underneath.

SOILS/HABITAT: Sandy, silt loam; dry; prairies, open woods. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; cream or white with pink or yellow.

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

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.



Plains milkweed (*A. pumila*)

PLANT: Upright, unbranched to branched stems; 1' max. **LEAVES:**

Alternate; thin and narrow; dense

on stems. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, clayey, rocky; dry; prairies, plains, low hills, badlands, floodplains, woods. **BLOOM:** Jul-Aug; white to greenish white.



Slimleaf milkweed (*A. stenophylla*)

PLANT: Upright, unbranched stems; 2' max. **LEAVES:**

Alternate to nearly opposite; very thin; folded lengthwise. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy, rocky; dry; prairies, meadows. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug;

yellow to pale green with touches of white.

Additional milkweeds in Nebraska, North Dakota, and/or South Dakota: *Asclepias amplexicaulis*, *A. asperula* ssp. *capricornu*, *A. lanuginosa*, *A. latifolia*, *A. sullivantii*, *A. tuberosa*, *A. viridis*.

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>).

PHOTOS: Jim Fowler (*A. syriaca*); Chris Helzer / The Nature Conservancy (*A. arenaria*); 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.

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