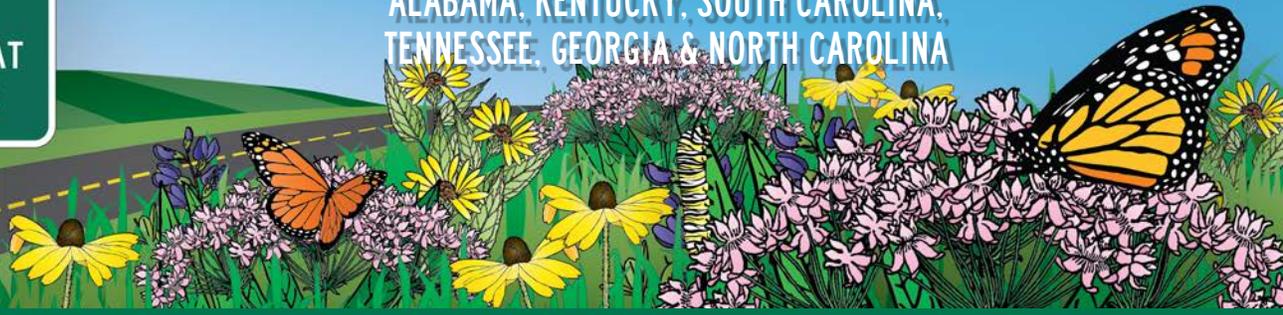




# MILKWEEDS OF THE SOUTHEAST

ALABAMA, KENTUCKY, SOUTH CAROLINA,  
TENNESSEE, GEORGIA & NORTH CAROLINA



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** →

↑  
**MAX  
HEIGHT**  
↓

**RHIZOMATOUS**  
MAY BE MORE  
TOLERANT OF MOWING

## The most common milkweeds in roadsides in the Southeast Region (in alphabetical order):

Clasping milkweed (*A. amplexicaulis*)



**PLANT:** Upright, unbranched stems; smooth. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; wavy margins; base of leaves clasp stem. **HABITAT:** Sandhills, grasslands, savannas, woodland edges. **SOILS:** Sandy, gravelly; dry. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; light to dark pink with cream or green; fragrance of cloves and roses.

Butterfly milkweed (*A. tuberosa*)



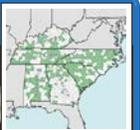
**PLANT:** One to many spreading to upright stems; with short hairs; lacks milky sap. **LEAVES:** Alternate; lance-shaped; hairy underneath. **HABITAT:** Grasslands, old fields, open woods, pine barrens. **SOILS:** Sandy, loamy, rocky; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Sep; orange to red or yellow.

Redring milkweed (*A. variegata*)



**PLANT:** Upright, unbranched stems; purplish-green; usually smooth. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; usually smooth. **HABITAT:** Savannas, rocky woodlands and edges, banks of streams; part shade. **SOILS:** Sandy, rocky, loamy to clay-loam; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Jul; white or cream, 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:** Grasslands, open woods, disturbed areas, barrens, sandhills, rock outcrops (especially mafic rocks). **SOILS:** Sandy, rocky, clayey; dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Sep; white or cream with green.

## Most common milkweed species *continued*

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

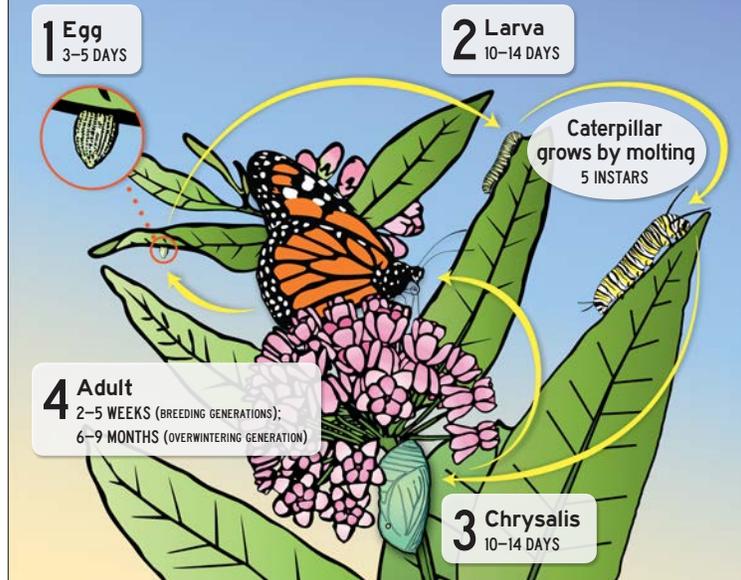


**PLANT:** Unbranched stems, spreading to upright; with short hairs. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped with edges folded upward or wavy; with short hairs. **HABITAT:** Open woodlands, woodland edges, barrens, grasslands, glades (especially over mafic or calcareous rocks). **SOILS:** Sandy to loamy or rocky; dry-dry-mesic. **BLOOM:** May-Aug; light green to yellowish green with pink.

### 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)

## THE MONARCH BUTTERFLY LIFE CYCLE

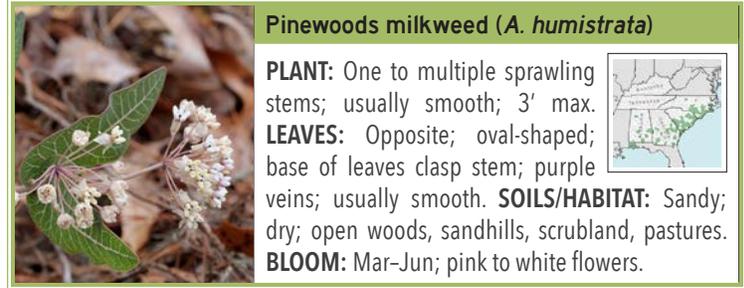


Multiple generations of monarchs are produced over the spring and summer, with the fall generation migrating to overwintering sites. You can monitor monarchs or milkweeds; see Additional Resources above.

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## Less common roadside milkweeds:

### Pinewoods milkweed (*A. humistrata*)



**PLANT:** One to multiple sprawling stems; usually smooth; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; base of leaves clasp stem; purple veins; usually smooth. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy; dry; open woods, sandhills, scrubland, pastures. **BLOOM:** Mar-Jun; pink to white flowers.

### Swamp milkweed (*A. incarnata*)



**PLANT:** One to many upright branched stems; smooth or with short hairs; 5' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; lance-shaped or narrow; with sparse short hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Silty, loamy, clayey; moist-wet; grasslands, ditches, edges of lakes, streams. **BLOOM:** Jul-Sep; light to dark pink or rose purple.

### Longleaf milkweed (*A. longifolia*)



**PLANT:** Upright, unbranched slender stem; with few hairs; 3' max. **LEAVES:** Alternate; narrow and lance-shaped; with few hairs. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to loamy or loam-clay; wet; pinelands, savannas, swamps. **BLOOM:** May-Jun; dark pink and white, tipped with green.

### Common milkweed (*A. syriaca*)



**PLANT:** One to many stout, upright, unbranched stems; with short dense hairs; 5' max. **LEAVES:** Opposite; oval-shaped; hairy underneath. **SOILS/HABITAT:** Sandy to loamy, clayey or rocky; dry-wet; grasslands, disturbed areas, railways, edges of lakes, ponds, streams. **BLOOM:** Jun-Aug; pink.

**Additional milkweeds in the Southeast:** *Asclepias cinerea*, *A. connivens*, *A. exaltata*, *A. hirtella*, *A. lanceolata*, *A. michauxii*, *A. obovata*, *A. pedicellata*, *A. perennis*, *A. purpurascens*, *A. quadrifolia*, *A. rubra*, *A. tomentosa*, *A. viridis*, *A. viridula*.

### Maps & Distribution Data:

These profiles are derived from regional floras and field guides (e.g., Weakley 2019) 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>).

**PHOTO CREDITS:** Jim Fowler (*A. syriaca*, *A. longifolia*); Mary Keim / flickr (*A. humistrata*, *A. incarnata*); Krista Lundgren, USFWS / flickr (*A. viridiflora*); Jerry Oldenettel / flickr (*A. verticillata*); Karan A. Rawlins, University of Georgia / Bugwood.org (*A. variegata*); Xerces Society / Nancy Lee Adamson (*A. amplexicaulis* [right]); Paul Rothrock / SEINet (*A. amplexicaulis* [left]); 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.